

Weekly Newsletter: 21 October 2025

Reflection: What Does It Mean to Wrestle with God?

By Joe Barnard

Come, O Thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see;
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee.
With Thee all night I mean to stay
And wrestle till the break of day.
- Charles Wesley

In Genesis 32 we read that God came to Jacob and the two of them wrestled until the break of day. I'm convinced this is not an abnormal experience. The God who took Jacob to the mat will come repeatedly in the night to grapple with us, too. In fact, I think we can say more: One of the chief metaphors for understanding a life with God is wrestling. I'm not alone in supposing this. In Calvin's commentary on Genesis, he says that the purpose of Jacob's experience is, in part, "to represent all the servants of God in this world as wrestlers; because the Lord exercises them with various kinds of conflicts." What a thought! Whether we are twenty or eighty years old, we must be ready to have our numbers called. Right now the hands of God might just be taking hold of us to try our strength and test our endurance.

Now, what does it actually mean to wrestle with God? Here are five brief thoughts.

1- Realising Your Chief Business Is with God Himself

Christian monotheism is a radical truth. It reveals that there is a sovereign God who is the invisible hand behind all of our circumstances. This insight ought to change how we understand everything in life. Sickness and suffering can never be detached from God's wisdom, power and love. He is the one orchestrating everything for His glory and our good. There are no accidents; there is no randomness.

One implication of this is that, when we feel ourselves thrown down by the force of circumstances, the one we must grab hold of- even struggle against- is none other than the Almighty. Here David is our great model. In Psalm after Psalm, he does not lament fate or fume at Satan. His hands are ever on Yahweh. He tosses and turns with God from one emotion to another until faith prevails.

2- Engaging God, Not Ignoring Him

Realising that our business is with God is not the same as actually wrestling with Him. All of us have been habituated by cheap amusement. We use our TVs and mobile phones like drugs. As soon as we are conscious of emotional pain, we turn to social media or a favourite TV programme for the same relief that others find in pot or heroin.

I'll be frank: this is a coward's tactic. God does not permit pain in our lives so that we can tap out, but so that we can dig in. The pain is purposeful: It's a call to engage God, not ignore him. Wrestlers are not meant to hide from pressure; they are meant to squirm under it. If God puts His weight on us, we are meant to press back on Him.

3- Persevering to the Point of Emptiness

I'm amazed by the stamina of Jacob. We all know what it's like to reach a point of exhaustion. Many of us are quick to give up. This is true physically and spiritually. As soon as we feel a touch of fatigue, that's us finished.

Not Jacob. He presses on, and on - and *on* - until God says, "Let me go". The scene would smell of impiety if it were not presented in Scripture as heroic.

What are we meant to learn from this? The Eagle-eyed poet, Charles Wesley, grasps the point when he writes,

What tho' my shrinking flesh complain,
And murmur to contend so long,
I rise superior to my pain;
When I am weak then I am strong.
And when my all of strength shall fail,
I shall with the God-man prevail.

The insight we need is this: "when I am weak then I am strong". This is an abiding spiritual principle as durable as the earth itself. God presses on us from the outside so that He can give us strength from the inside. The dynamic may sound strange, but it is as real and undeniable as gravity. Strength is perfected in weakness.

4- Crying Out for the Blessing Only God Can Give

Audaciously, Jacob says, "I will not let you go until you bless me". Why does he say this? Because he knows something many of us have yet to learn: Our deepest needs are for things that God and *God only* can supply. To let go of God is to forfeit at life. Life is not found apart from God, but in God. Therefore, we cannot let go of God until He releases the blessing that is His uniquely to bestow.

5- Finding Oneself Broken and Strengthened at the Same Time

The Christian life is full of paradoxes. One of them is the way in which brokenness is not a sign of defeat, but of strength. Put another way, the greatest of Christians are those that walk with a limp.

Jacob is the emblem of this. He wrestles with God an entire night to the point of receiving a new name and a fresh dispensation of blessing. What is the end result? He doesn't strut; he shambles. Forever, he must drag one foot behind the other.

This injury is not a sign of having lost, but- oddly- of having won. He conquered in the best of all possible ways. How is this? I'll let Wesley have the last word:

Contented now upon my thigh
I halt, till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weakness I,
On Thee alone for strength depend,
Nor have I power from Thee to move;
Thy nature, and Thy name is Love.

Jane Paxton

We were saddened by the news last week of Jane's death but rejoice that she is now with her Saviour who she loved and served so faithfully. Please pray for her family as they make funeral arrangements and those in the church family grieving. We will let you know when we have details of the funeral.

Christina and Norna's Funeral Arrangements

Christina Ronaldson's funeral will take place on **Monday 27 October** at 12.30pm at Warriston Crematorium. Everyone is welcome and Christina's family invite us to join them afterwards at Leonardo Hotel, 187 Clermiston Road, Edinburgh.

Norna Swanson's funeral will take place on **Friday 31 October** at 1.30pm at Warriston Crematorium (**family only, please**) and then a Thanksgiving Service at Holyrood at 2.30pm to which everyone is warmly invited. Light refreshments will be served in the church afterwards.

This Sunday Evening...

Just a reminder that this Sunday evening is the **East of Scotland Gospel Partnership Joint Service at 7pm** (please note the later time!) at Charlotte Chapel. There will be no evening service at Holyrood and we look forward to worshipping together at Charlotte Chapel.

Quiz Evening – Friday 14 November



The Mission Team are planning a Quiz Evening on **Friday 14 November** from 7pm – 9.30pm in the church.

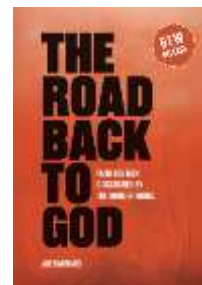
Refreshments and bakes will be served. Please keep the evening free and think about who you could invite!

Contact Alex and Shona if you have any questions.

The Road Back to God – Book Event

Joe would appreciate prayer as he heads through to the GLO bookshop in Motherwell this Saturday (25 October) to speak about his new book *The Road Back to God - Faith for Men Dissatisfied by the Modern World*.

The event starts at 10am, costs £5 and coffee and bacon rolls are provided. Contact 01698 275343 or books@glo-Europe.org for more details.



Women's Discipleship at Holyrood

Our Thursday Bible Studies are now finished for this term and restart on 22 January 2026!

Two dates for your diaries and more details will follow soon. All women are welcome and we'd love to see you at -

- Our next **Ladies' Breakfast** on **Saturday 8 November** from 9.30 – 11am in the church. Sarah Shearer from Musselburgh Baptist will be our speaker.
- Our **Christmas lunch** on **Thursday 4 December**. We'll go to a restaurant near the church and enjoy food and fellowship together.

There's a small team (Anna Barnard, Anncris Roberts, Norma Shippin and Liz Scott) who organise these events, lead the Bible studies and make up the Women's Ministry Team. Please let us know if you have any questions or comments, we'd love to hear from you!

Church Calendar

For your info and prayers:

- Wednesday: Home Groups (contact Liz@holyroodevangelical.org for more details)
- Thursday: Session meeting at 7pm
- Sunday:
 - Morning service at 10.30am – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
 - East of Scotland Gospel Partnership Joint Evening Service at 7pm at Charlotte Chapel
- Monday:
 - Baby and Toddler Group from 10am – 11.30am
 - Christina Ronaldson's Funeral at 12.30pm at Warriston Crematorium



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