

Why Doesn't God Answer My Prayer (Jacob, Gen 32)

A-land: unmitigated disaster...small fledgling church... Grieve and pray for everyone, but especially for fellow xians. We have people in the region seeking to minister to those there.

Genesis 32, if you have your Bible.

In Ruth Bell Graham's book *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them* (BTW, some of you asked about the book I referenced last week, it was this one: **Prayers for Your Children** by a local pastor, James Banks; I've got a few books I'll reference today--instead of blowing me up on social media, we'll put them all out on Summit social media right after service. Particularly, for you parents, let me also suggest **Prayers for Prodigals** (it's by the same author, James Banks--it's 90 days of prayer for your kid particularly in their teenage years and beyond); **Come Back, Barbara**, by Jack Miller, who is one of the godliest pastors I've ever read, who himself had a prodigal, and he writes about how God overcomes your mistakes and how he works in your life in the process, sometimes showing you that you're just as much as the prodigal as the kid you're praying for; and, of course, there's my new book **Just Ask**, available now at our campuses. If you are interested in any of those, check out our social media channels later.

Well, again, in her book *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them*, Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife, tells the story of waking up in the middle of the night worried for one of her kids. I don't know if you know this, but Billy and Ruth Graham, two of the most significant Christians of the 20th century, had prodigals in their family, most notoriously their oldest son, Franklin, who for many years ran from God hard. She says about this night, "It was around three o'clock. The name of someone I loved dearly flashed into my mind. It was like an electric shock. Instantly I was wide awake. I knew there would be no more sleep for me for the rest of the night. So I lay there and prayed for the one who was trying hard to run from God. When it is dark and the imagination runs wild, there are fears only a mother can understand. Suddenly the Lord said to me, 'Quit studying the problems and start studying the promises.'"

That's our theme for today: *Quit studying the problems and start studying the promises.* That's where true tenacity in prayer is inspired. The Bible, I've told you, is a book of more than 3000 promises, and effective prayer begins with unearthing these promises and praying them back to God.

Today, I want to talk about wrestling with God in prayer and refusing to give up. We're going to use one of my favorite Old Testament stories, the story of Jacob wrestling with God-- Genesis 32. As we turn there, let me just point out that one of the most predominant themes in Jesus' teaching on prayer was the need to persist, to cling to the promises, and refuse to give up: It was so central that Luke summarized some of Jesus' parables on prayer this way: "Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up." (Luke 18:1)

- And to illustrate he tells this story about a widow who needs a Judge to give her justice, but the Judge ignores her because she doesn't have enough money to hire a lawyer and he's kind of a jerk who doesn't really care about doing the right thing just because it's right. And so, Jesus says, this woman camps out outside his house and every time he goes ANYWHERE--to work, the grocery store, the gym--she pesters him about her need. Watch this: "For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or respect people, yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so that she doesn't wear me out by her persistent coming.'" (Luke 18:4-5). And then Jesus says, "This is how you should pray to God." Now, his point, of course, is not to compare Jesus to an unjust judge, but to contrast him with one. He's saying, If even an unjust judge will respond to persistence, how much more your Heavenly Father?
- In contrast to this poor widow, we have a Heavenly Father who loves to hear from us; who is so in touch with us that he knows when a hair from our heads and values us so much that he sent his Son to die for us! But **some blessings he only grants through persistence in asking.**

Today we'll look at one of the clearest pictures of that in the whole Bible: the story of Jacob wrestling with God. (BTW, I've always heard that **everything we really need to know about God** can be found in Genesis--every core doctrine, every beautiful truth, every essential Christian practice, it's all in Genesis; the rest of the Bible just expands on the themes introduced in this first book. **That's certainly true of what we're going to look at today.** Prayer is a major theme in Genesis; it appears in the most dramatic of ways again and again. **And don't miss the significance of that:** in the first book of the Bible, the book that lays out the foundation for all the rest, God establishes the primacy of prayer for how he works in our lives).

Genesis 32: Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, is in quite a pickle; his brother Esau is about to kill him. This is the culmination of a 30-year grudge.

Let me explain how he got there. Jacob had been a jerk for most of his life. Most significantly, he **cheated** his twin brother, Esau, out of the birthright. The birthright, in those days, **was the right to officially carry on the family name; it came with 2/3 of the father's wealth** and always went to the oldest son. Esau and Jacob were twins, but Esau was older by a couple of minutes.

Here's how it went down: **Esau and Jacob, though twins,** were very different. Esau was **tough;** macho, the "man's man" kind of guy. The text tells us he was hairy and liked to hunt. Today he would be the kind of guy who loves football, drives a Ford Raptor and has hair poking up out of the top of his shirt. The text tells us Jacob, however, had smooth skin and liked to cook, which meant he was more of an indoors-y guy. Today he'd probably be the kind of guy who watches the **Bachelor, drives a mini-Cooper** and has a **Pinterest** account.

Well, one day, when they were teenagers, Esau came in from hunting and was powerful hungry. Jacob had just finished cooking a pot of stew, and so Esau asked him for some. Jacob, sensing a moment of opportunity, said, "I'll trade you something for it." And Esau said, "**Like what?**" Jacob said, "How about your birthright?" Which was an INSANE ask, but Esau, being a teenager and **thinking impulsively** as teenagers are prone to do, not

having a **well-developed frontal cortex and all**, and being HANGRY on top of that, said, “*Sure... I mean, what good is my birthright if I die of hunger now? Just give me the soup.*” So they shook on it and said ‘no take backs’ and Esau effectively relinquished his birthright.

Well, a few years pass by and their dad, **Isaac, is about to die** and so Isaac, who probably **didn’t know anything about the deal**, and would have ignored it as a dumb teenage thing if he had known, wants to formally confer the blessing onto Esau. So, he asks Esau to go out and hunt him up some venison and prepare it so they can eat together and he can formally confer the blessing onto him. And so Esau leaves to go hunt.

Now, Isaac, by this point, is old—he can barely see or hear anymore. So Jacob thinks, “*Here’s my chance.*” One thing I forgot to tell you--Esau was Isaac’s favorite and Jacob was his momma’s favorite. So Jacob goes and gets his mom Rebekah’s help while Esau is out hunting. And she says, Genesis 27:8 **Now, my son, listen to me and do what I tell you. 9 Go to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, and I will make them into a delicious meal for your father—the kind he loves. 10 Then take it to your father to eat so that he may bless you before he dies... 15 Then Rebekah took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were in the house, and had her younger son Jacob wear them. 16 She put the skins of the young goats on his hands and the smooth part of his neck.** (I’m **not sure what** that says about Esau, that to look and smell like him you tie pieces of a dead goat to your neck and arms. But at any rate, **17 Then she handed the delicious food and the bread she had made to her son Jacob. Gen 27:8–17**) And he took it back in, disguised his voice and presented himself as Esau.

Well, **somehow they pull it off** and Isaac confers the blessing onto Jacob; and in those days, once a blessing had been formally bestowed, you couldn’t take it back, so when Esau gets home and finds out Jacob has heisted him, he vows to kill Jacob.

So, Jacob is scared of Esau anyway, so he flees, and is gone for 30 YEARS. Jacob turns out to be pretty resourceful and through a combination of hard work and more trickery, he becomes really wealthy. (His name, Jacob, by the way, means “grasper,” because when he and his brother were coming out of Rebekah’s womb, Esau came out first, but Jacob’s little hand came out right after Esau and grabbed ahold of his heel, as if to say, “*Get back in here; I wanted to be first.*” So his parents called him “grasper.” But the name “**Jacob**” **also means, “deceiver,”** and those two words--grasper and deceiver--pretty well sum up Jacob’s life. (Sincerest apologies if your name is Jacob)

Well, somewhere during those 30 years God started to work in Jacob’s life, and in chapter 31 God appears to Jacob, and, vs 3, **“The Lord said to him, ‘Go back to the land of your ancestors and to your family, and I will be with you.’” (31:3)**

To make a long story short, Jacob gets right with God and obeys, and so he starts the long journey home. But as he gets close to his birthplace, a place, remember, he hasn’t been for 30 years, he starts to wonder what Esau is going to say—Is Esau still mad? *Maybe he’s forgotten about the whole thing*--and suddenly he gets word that Esau has come out to greet him with 400 armed men, which is not the kind of group you bring for a

welcome party; it's the kind of group you bring for a massacre. So clearly he hasn't forgotten, and **Jacob plunges into despair**. And he prays: **Genesis 32:9**, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD **who said to me**, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' (Hear what he's doing? He's holding up God's words in front of him. 'God, you said return to your homeland and I'll do you good...') [10] I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant...[11] Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, (just in case you forgot who my brother was) for I fear him, that he may come and attack me... [12] **But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'**" (Again, for the 2ND TIME: He's **holding God's word** back up in front of him and saying, "God, you promised!")

And Jacob keeps praying to God like this all through the night, and sometime in the middle of the night, **24... a Man** (notice the capitalization) **came and wrestled with Jacob until dawn. 25** When the Man saw that **he couldn't win** the match, he touched Jacob's hip and knocked it out of joint at the socket. (God's signature finishing move--the hip flick! BTW, do you know how painful that would have been? Ever had your finger pulled out of joint? (RAISE) I've never had it happen to me but people tell me it's unbelievably painful--and the largest joint in your body is your hip and **this guy just touches it** with his finger and knocks it out of joint. So the question you should ask is, if this strange "Man" has that kind of power, how did he lose the wrestling match to Jacob? **26** Then the Man said, "Let me go, for it is dawn." (Again--this guy is so powerful that he can just touch Jacob's hip and knock it out of socket, but he's pinned and has to ask permission to leave? What's going on here?) **But Jacob panted, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."** (Imagine how much pain Jacob is in, his hip is out of socket! But he won't let go! "I won't let you go until you bless me!")

27 "What is your name?" the Man asked. He replied, "Jacob." (SIDEBAR: how do you wrestle with someone all night and not even know their name? Was this Heavenly Man just out looking for a random fight when he comes across Jacob and he says, "Pretty boy! You'll do!" and so they beat each other up all night and now he's like, "Who are you, anyway?" Of course not. **He already knows Jacob's name**; he just wants Jacob to admit his name. "SAY YOUR NAME." "My name is Jacob: it means liar and deceiver." **28** "Your name will no longer be Jacob," the Man told him. "It is now Israel" (which means, literally, you have wrestled with God and prevailed), **because you have struggled with both God and men and have won."**

29 "And what is your name?" Jacob asked him. "Why do you ask?" the man replied. "Uhh... I don't know. Maybe because you just snapped my hip socket out of joint and changed my birth name to a different one and it would be helpful if when I'm telling this story later I could at least tell people who you were."

29 Then the Man blessed Jacob there.

In the next few verses Jacob goes on to meet Esau. And **God changes Esau's heart**--when he sees his brother, instead of killing him, his heart melts and he lays down his weapons and **runs to embrace** him and they stand there weeping in each other's arms for a long time. Jacob goes on from this not only to be **reconciled to his**

brother, but also to **father the Jewish nation**. His 12 sons would become the 12 tribes of Israel, and from one of those tribes, the tribe of Judah, Jesus himself would be born.

Ah... SO. MANY. QUESTIONS.

- **First, who is this strange Man Jacob wrestles with?** Some commentators say it was an angel. Most theologians, however, believe it is God himself, taking a human body, because of what Jacob says in vs. **30** *Jacob named the place Peniel—"face of God"—for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared."*
- **So then the question becomes, "If Jacob is wrestling with God, how did God not win?"** Again, the guy is clearly strong enough that he could whip Jacob whenever he wants--I mean, with the flick of his finger he knocked Jacob's hip out of joint--yet he lets himself be pinned. And what you see is that God is teaching us something important about prevailing with God in prayer. **Many of the blessings of God are released into our lives only through persistent, unrelenting prayer.** He wants you to "pin him," so to speak.
- **But that raises another question:** God had clearly promised these blessings to Jacob. He had told him, "Go back home and I'll bless you!" So, why does Jacob have to wrestle all night with God to obtain the blessing?
- **Write this down:** *Many of the blessings of God are released into our lives only through persistent, unrelenting prayer.* God had promised this blessing to Jacob, yet Jacob had to wrestle with God all night to get it. And only after a full night of wrestling does God let you pin him and obtain the blessing. As a pastor, I find that people don't have a problem with praying. The problem is they don't see a lot of the things they pray for happen immediately and so they give up, assuming prayer doesn't work. They don't have a prayer problem, they have a persistence problem. This text addresses that.
- Do you remember Martin Luther's definition of effective prayer that I gave you? **Effective Prayer = Catching Christ in his words.** Well, this story adds another dimension to that. Sometimes you wrestle with God for a long time to get those blessings.
 - (Not talking about salvation or forgiveness here... Requests for wisdom. Scripture promises those blessings the first time you ask them. We're talking about the outpouring of God's goodness into some area of your life--a broken relationship, a career choice, a ministry opportunity

Now, you ask, "Well, why? Why does God do it this way?" And I always turn here to the words of Martin Luther, who compares it to the father who has something his kid wants in his hand but won't let it go at first to test his child's resolve, to see how badly the kid wants it. He resists, to test his kid's strength and resolve to get it. God does that with us, Luther says. He holds this blessing in his hand as we wrestle with him and he asks, "How desperate are you for this?" Or, "How quickly are you going to give up on me? Do you really believe I am good? Do you really trust me?" (By the way, a few weeks ago I asked you, "Why does God sometimes make us persist in asking and not just give us what we ask the first time we ask it?" And I said, "I don't know," and you laughed. And that's partially true; I don't know all the specific reasons in each situation God delays. But I do know, based on stories like Jacob's, what his purpose is for us in the waiting. Scripture tells us. He does so to purify and perfect our faith. *"Do you really trust me? Do you really believe I am good? Do you really believe that I am the only one who can give this, or are you hatching a plan-B in case I'm not*

really good and don't come through? And if I delay, are you going to give up and assume I don't care, or even that I don't exist?"

Our belief in the goodness of God is measured by how long we will persist in prayer when the answer doesn't come.

And write this down: **Real prayer**--the kind that comes from your soul, the kind Jacob prayed--**usually leaves us with a wound**, like Jacob received--where God drives us to the end of ourselves--where we exhaust all of our abilities and lose any confidence that we can do anything and from that point onward we walk with a limp.

Have you been there? You feel desperate about something--some change you want to see in your life, or someone else's life, or a situation, and you despair, and at some point you find yourself screaming at God, 'I can't do this! You're the only one who can do this! You're the only one who can give this blessing and I won't let you go-- because I have no other alternatives!'--**and from that point on we spend the rest of our lives walking with a limp**, reminding us of when God brought us to that point of despair and we clung to HIM because we had no other alternative.

Spurgeon: It's usually when you have no words and you can only groan--that's when you've offered your best prayer.¹

This is what the Bible teaches us effective prayer looks like. We press through what looks like God's unwillingness to lay hold of his promises.

And don't just think this is a one-off teaching from the book of Genesis. I could use example after example from the life of Jesus. I've already shown you how he taught this principle of persistence in asking in some of his parables, but we'll see the same pattern play out again and again in how he performs his miracles. Here's one: **Mark 7:** A Syro-Phoenician woman came to Jesus to get healing for her daughter. Jesus said, "Woman, it's not right I take the children's bread and give it to the dogs." He called the woman a dog. I've heard commentators say that, "Oh, the word he used means 'small dog,' but yeah, it still means dog. It's not a flattering term. What is he doing? He's resisting her. But what does she do? She presses back. "Yes, Lord, but even..." That's her version of wrestling. "You're acting like you are trying to get away, but I won't let go until you bless me." And what happens? Jesus said, "Great is your faith!" and he gives her the blessing. Think of it like this: **Instead of doing what he originally said he would do, Jesus did what the woman believed he could and would do.**

Jim Cymbala, Pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, who wrote one of the best books on prayer I've ever read, called *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, said, **"The great battle of our spiritual lives is 'Will you believe?' It is not, 'Will you try harder?' or 'Can you make yourself worthy?' It is squarely a matter of believing that God will do what only he can do."** And then you pray and pray and wrestle and don't give up until God gives the blessing.

¹ Spurgeon's Sermons, 55:3128, 1909

I know I'm talking to a lot of people this weekend who are waiting on God to answer your prayer. And you say, **"Why hasn't God answered my prayer?"**

It's a fair question, and some of you it's led you to doubt God's goodness, or to wonder if he even exists. So I want to end this message by giving you 4 reasons, gleaned from this story, for why God may not be answering your prayer:

1. Maybe you aren't yet pursuing his will

It's significant that this wrestling match didn't happen until Jacob had stopped his life of swindling and was on his way back to the Promised Land.

God will not pour blessing into your life when you are living in open rebellion to him. The Psalmist says, **"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."** (Ps 66:18) Peter says to husbands that if they are mistreating their wives, then their prayers will be hindered (1 Peter 3:7) and multiple other places where Jesus says open sin cuts us off from the blessing of God.

Listen: If you have never surrendered yourself to the Lordship of Jesus, God puts himself under no obligation to hear your prayers. You're not yet his child, and so NONE of the promises of prayer are yours. I don't say that to be mean; in fact, you can become God's child right now, today. Just repent of your sin right now and receive his free offer to forgive and save you. But until you do that, none of these promises of prayer are yours.

Now, maybe you've done that--you are a Christian who has received Christ--but right now, this weekend, you are living with some kind of unconfessed, willful sin. Again: **"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."** (Ps 66:18) Your sin has placed a block between you and God that Scripture says may keep your prayer from being answered. ***Is that true in your life? Is the Holy Spirit putting his finger on something in your life right now?***

Now, I want to give one caveat here, because specifically in the case of children who have walked away from God, many parents assume it's some sin in their lives that has made their child wander. **The author of *Prayers for Prodigals* said, "(When we parents are not getting an answer to our prayers to bring our prodigal children back), we look for someone to blame, and don't look very far. More than one parent of a prodigal son or daughter has found themselves asking, "Is God punishing me through my child for something I did in the past?"**

The author says emphatically no. **Ezekiel 18:20 says clearly** that in the new covenant God will not punish the children for the sins of the father. The better explanation is John 9, where the disciples ask if a man's blindness was because of his parents' sin, and Jesus said, **3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him."**

God is creating a situation where he gets to show off his power and grace. So, in other words, parents, *hear me*: it's not your fault. The father in Jesus' story of the prodigal son hadn't done anything wrong, per se. (There's nothing in Jesus' story that indicates that the young son left because of failures in the father. You can't blame yourself.) They get to make their own decisions. God only created two humans directly, Adam and Eve, and they both rebelled.

They're not being punished for your failures; God has just created a situation where you have to press into his grace. The wrong thing to do in the situation of a prodigal is to blame yourself; the right thing to do is to **pray that "God's great works would be displayed in him (or her.)"**

But, to return to the main point, if you're not experiencing an answer to prayer, you should at least ask, "*Am I pursuing God's will in all the ways I know how?*" And once you are satisfied that you are, you can proceed to:

2. Maybe he has a better plan

We have to acknowledge that with our limited knowledge, we can't know everything and sometimes God overrules us, in love. Sometimes I overrule my kids' requests of me not despite my lack of love for them, but because of it! I have to get something for my 16 year old to drive. Naturally, she wants an Audi. Instead, I got her a Honda Accord, stick shift. She says, "Why am I having to learn to drive a stick? This is so hard." And I say, "I know, but (a) I think this is actually a valuable skill to have, and (b) this will help remove the temptation to have the phone in your hand when you drive." I'm giving her something different because I have a better plan. Now, I'm not saying I'm infinitely wise; maybe my decision is not the right one. But the wisdom of our Heavenly Father is always better.

So, Jesus teaches us to begin every prayer by saying, "Your will be done." No less than the Apostle Paul was told by God in answer to a persistent prayer, "I'm not going to remove this thorn from your flesh like you asked because I've got a better plan, and my grace will be sufficient for you in the affliction."² Quite often God is up to something better in our lives that we just can't see yet.

Tim Keller summarizes it this way: "***God will either give us what we ask for in prayer or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knows.***"

Let me give you one biblical example--and there are HUNDREDS: Do you remember the story where Zechariah is in the Temple and Gabriel appears to him and tells him he is going to have a son--John the Baptist? I saw something in that story the other day that I'd never seen before. When the angel first appeared to him, he said **Luke 1:13, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John."** The first thing the angel says is, "God has heard your prayers." But here's the thing. How long ago had he stopped praying that prayer for a kid? The text says that Zechariah and Elizabeth were *very old*--not just old, but *very old*--ancient; as in, **so old that an all-nighter**

² 2 Cor 12:9

for him meant not getting up to go to the bathroom; or, so old that if you said something to Zechariah about getting lucky he just assumed you meant finding a good parking spot at the grocery store. You following me? Like late 70's, early 80's old. I can see Zechariah and Elizabeth praying to get pregnant into their 40's, maybe they were even bold enough to do it into their 50's. But now she's in her late 70's. That's a prayer they had to have LONG ago stopped praying. They just assumed that God had said "no" or wasn't listening. **But when the angel shows up the FIRST thing he says is, "Oh no, God heard you.** He just had a better plan. One you had to wait for. And one you couldn't have comprehended had he tried to explain it to you."³

Friend, what if, **when we get to heaven,** we see there was something like this for every supposed unanswered prayer in our lives?

Ruth Bell Graham: "When I am dealing with an all-powerful, all-knowing God, I, as a mere mortal, must offer my petitions not only with persistence but also with patience. Someday I'll know why."⁴

3. Maybe you are approaching God without confidence in his goodness

James 1:5 Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly (no condemnation)—and it will be given to him. [6] But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. [7] That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, [8] being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.

You have to believe that he is good and that he will provide it. You have to be certain of his goodness and his willingness. This is not "name and claim it" theology. Name it and claim it theology is when you believe you know better than God what you need and he's obligated to give it. What James is talking about is approaching God with certainty about his character and his promise of goodness. *'Jesus, I know you're good; I know you're listening. You are just like I see you in the Gospels; just as attentive; just as moved with compassion; you are the same yesterday, today and forever.'*

I believe James' promise about asking for wisdom would apply to anything we ask for. When we ask, we have to be certain of the goodness and character of Jesus, or, like James said, we will receive nothing from him. "That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord." **So, let us say as we pray:** *"Jesus, I know you're good; I know you're listening, and I know you're able to help. Just like I see you in the Gospels."*

Remember, "The great battle of our spiritual lives is 'Will you believe?' It is not, 'Will you try harder?' or 'Can you make yourself worthy?' It is squarely a matter of believing that God will do what only he can do."

4. Maybe you have not yet prayed long enough

Maybe there is a little bit more of the night of wrestling ahead. Don't give up, friend. Hold on to that Heavenly Man and say, with Jacob, "I will NOT let you go until you bless me."

MUSIC

³ *Prayers for Your Children*, 134

⁴ Ruth Bell Graham, *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them*

Remember Martin Luther's definition of effective prayer: **'Effective Prayer = Catching Christ in his own words.'** And then wrestling with him until he fulfills it. Hold onto God, cling to him in desperation through the darkest hour of the night, saying, "God, why aren't you doing this yet? God, you promised!"

Listen: God feeling distant is just an illusion. **He's testing your faith in his goodness.** He's seeing if you give up on him; turn away from him to something else. Or conclude he doesn't exist. And **he's giving you a wound** at the place of your brazen, foolish self-confidence that caused you to wander into a life of grasping and deceiving, and through this time of waiting on him he's going to create in you a limp; a limp where you lean on his strength and not yours anymore. And for the rest of your life I promise you that you'll look back and say, **"That's the most blessed wound I ever received."**

So press on, my friends. Some answers are only given after a night of painful wrestling. Don't give up. After all, we are praying to the God who went through the darkness of Gethsemane and the pain of Golgotha for us. I can assure you he's listening.

Do you feel like he doesn't care about your broken marriage, your unsaved husband, your wayward child, your lost friends? He does. The distance is just an illusion. Keep praying. And **if you push with persistence, and get past the resistance, what you'll find is not indifference, but intimacy.**

Here's a story I tell in *Just Ask*:

The nineteenth-century evangelist and orphanage-founder George Mueller committed to pray every day for five young men to be saved, two of which were one of his best friends' kids. He prayed for 18 months before the first one came to Christ. (Which is a long time—think about it, that's 540 days--Have you ever prayed for the same thing every day for over 500 days before seeing an answer?)

When that first young man was saved, George Mueller wrote in his journal that he praised God for this one, but that there were four more left, so he would keep praying. After another five years, the second one came to Christ. He kept praying. Another six more years, the third one came to Christ. He kept praying. 36 years later--Mueller was now a very old man--and Mueller wrote in his journal, right before he died, of those last two who were still unconverted and he wouldn't stop praying. He said, **"I continue to hope in God and pray on."** And then he died. But just a couple years after his death, the final two—the sons of his friend—came to faith in Christ.⁵

He had prayed daily for these two young men for almost 45 years. Mueller had taken seriously what Jesus wanted to teach all his people: "that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

Don't stop. Don't give up. Don't ever give up.

⁵ Vance Christie, "The Half-Century Prayer Request of George Muller," <http://vancechristie.com/2020/05/07/the-half-century-prayer-request-of-george-muller/>.

Invitation

*I think we have some people here this weekend who need to hear that. You've been about to give up. I'm going to invite our **prayer counselors** up. I'm going to give you **3 categories**:*

- *Physical healing*
- *Financial provision*
- *You're really burdened over someone who needs Jesus--a prodigal son or daughter, a friend, etc.*