

WRESTLING WITH LIFE AND GOD: + Dessert Song, School Hymn

By Debbie Williams

Ever been through a period in your life when you felt under attack on every side?

Everything appears to be in chaos and there just seems to be no place of peace and order.

Everyone everywhere seems to be making demands on you, and there is no time for you just to be you.

You wonder what on earth you did wrong to deserve all this... When will it end?

You long for a place of rest.

Where is God and why is He allowing this? Can't He see you've had enough?

I've been reading about brokenness and Jacob lately in my quiet times which I guard jealously. It's afforded some timely reflection and encouragement.

Jacob wrestled within his family, cheating his brother of his blessing as the eldest; he wrestled with Laban over the promise of Rachel for his wife, and was cheated into working 14 years before he secured her; ultimately Jacob wrestled with God in the form of the angel as we all know over the long night before God blessed him.

So what can we learn from these episodes and how can we be encouraged?

W= Wait... for God's time. He promises 'He has begun a good work in me, and He will be faithful to complete it', bringing me through in His way and His timing. 'The trial of my faith is more precious than gold even though it be tried by fire'. Times of trial produce character, perseverance and hope which does not disappoint as we know God has poured out His love into our hearts by His Holy Spirit who He has given to comfort and encourage us on to the future goal He has prepared for us.

R= Rely on the Lord. Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength; they will rise on the wings of eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31. Everything is from God and He will not disappoint. Besides, His ways are greater than our ways – why take 40 years in the Wilderness wandering aimlessly like the Israelites when, with our eyes focused on Jesus and armed with the shield of faith like David, we can overcome all manner of giants who would have us believe their voices of lies instead of God's voice of truth which brings freedom and release if we'll just leave our burdens at the foot of the Cross. I love God when He pointedly commands us no less than 366 times in His Word not to worry – that's one for every day, including the Leap Years. I must take Him at His Word and learn not to worry.

E= Expect trials which are sent so we may be proved mature and complete. Be encouraged; God only disciplines those He loves so that we can share in His holiness. At the time it can be very painful, but we are assured it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those of us who have been trained by it and who endure. Therefore Hebrews exhorts us to throw off everything that hinders us, all sin that so easily entangles us so we can run with perseverance the race set before us with our eyes fixed on Jesus,

the anchor and perfecter of our faith who endured far more than most of us will ever be expected to face, the shame and scorn of the Cross which paid the ransom for you and me. Instead we should ask for wisdom, as God promises He will give it to us generously, without finding fault.

Remember: No trial or temptation has seized us that is not common to all; and God who is faithful will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear; so when we are tempted, He will provide a way out that will ensure we can stand. How good is that? We just need to trust and rely on Him.

S= Seek God and you will find Him when you seek Him with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength. As we know from Psalms with David and from Jeremiah 29:13. That means effort; being deliberate and not deterred by the things the Devil has put in my way as distractions. Matthew 6 when addressing the vexed issue of worry reminds us that the antidote is to 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; that He will provide for us all the things we need because He knows us, He loves us, and our every need before we even ask – how amazing and special is that!

T= Trust God as He won't let us down. He is no man's debtor. He won't lead us anywhere that His grace isn't sufficient to get us through. He has a plan for us... for a future of hope and purpose which will come in His due season. In the meantime what does He require of us? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

I enjoy looking back regularly on His faithfulness, being encouraged by all He had brought me through; daily, over the last few months, the last years and indeed all my life. By keeping my eyes on God as Peter did with Jesus when he walked on the water, I was and am able to get through. His promise is grace for today, the present, lived one day at a time, knowing tomorrow has enough cares of its own for when I get there.

L= Listen for God's small voice as it comes in its many guises; the lyrics of a song to encourage me; the wisdom of a friend who reaches out in love to correct; the snippets and gems from the many inspirational presenters on Radio Rhema as I daily travel to and from school; the wonderful books I, like Lydia, pour through with honest, wise writers like John Ortberg and Philip Yancy; the council of my more experienced peers who are there when we have the humility to enlist their support. Let's ensure the ground of our hearts is ever ready for the good seed of God's Word to be established in us.

E= Enjoy the countless blessings of each new day; the beautiful view from my home each morning as I walk on the hill with Kedge, my elderly dog who is now reduced to a stroll. God must have a wicked sense of humour: maybe that's the speed He wants me to experience to start each day, so I can slow down at least once to really savour the frantic chirping of the birds as they celebrate a new day; the power of the surf as it rolls in inspiring me for the challenges the new day will herald, and then soothing my soul as I return home exhausted by the demands of the day, especially as I wrestle with some of the challenging individuals of one Y11 foods class recently. The majesty of the Southern Alps scenery which spans before me from Kaikoura to Porters, which God created for His enjoyment and great pleasure and which I can share with Him. The faithful love of my husband who greets me each evening with the fire blazing, a relaxing drink and the sensational smells of yet another delicious meal I haven't had to even think about. Yes life is good when I look beyond the challenges, the chaos of painting covers which are moving as I finish yet another wall as I prepare my much loved home and haven of recent years for sale.

I take comfort in Brooke Fraser's Desert Song as it explores the seasons of life: the dry desert place where we long for Jehovah Jireh to provide in our extreme time of need; the time of fire when we experience true weakness, trial and pain; the place of battle where victory seems so far away; the times of harvest when we can pour out the blessings we have received in the service of others from our place of refilling and refreshment.

Life resembles the Coast-to-Coast mountain run: there is a lot of potentially dangerous Deception River Valley to be navigated, with its many demanding river crossings and huge boulder hops to traverse before one arrives with temporary euphoria at the mountain top of Goat Pass flats. One is only here briefly however before the journey takes one back down into the Mingha Valley with the painful, deceptively sharp challenge of Dudley's Knob en route out to Klondyke Corner. God blesses us with beautiful mountain top experiences but these are the exceptions, the highlights which encourage and drive us on when negotiating the more mundane valley experiences which frequent most of our lives.

How big is my God that He should consider even me His lowly servant? I Thank God that He can take this cracked pot and make a beautiful garden when I submit to His plans, His purposes and His timing in my life. I am sorry Lord for looking down and being consumed by the storm raging round me, fussing like Martha over so many things when all you wanted was for me to be like Mary chilling out with you, enjoying the unforced rhythms of your grace.