

Dear Disciples of the Lord,

Martin Luther, the Reformer, taught that the Christian should pray and pray persistently. To illustrate his point he told the story of Monica. Monica lived in the fourth century A.D. and had a son who she wanted to be a Christian. He would not listen to her and he grieved her by living a wild life. He even lived with a woman and had a child out of wedlock. When Monica could do no more for her son, she continued to pray. She persisted in prayer for years. Finally the Lord answered her prayers. He son, Augustine, became a Christian. Not only did he become a Christian but became one of the most famous instructors and teachers of the Christian faith in history.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Monica; *What Luther Says*, page 1094)

Jesus makes a strong statement for his disciples to persist in prayer in his parable of *The Widow and the Unjust Judge*. Jesus did this to encourage us to pray and never give up.

The Old Testament reading give us real life event that teaches us to persist in prayer. We hear of the Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham not only persisting in prayer, but actually wrestling with the Lord. He will not let go of the Lord until he receives a blessing. We will look at this unusual incident and remember that **The Lord Wants You to Wrestle with Him in Prayer.**

1. Bring your troubles.

Some person might ask, "*The Lord wants me to pray, but what am I suppose to pray about?*" The Scriptures direct us to pray for needs for ourselves and others. We are to also pray in times of trouble. In Psalm 50:15 we have the invitation, "**Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.**" This is what Jacob was doing, bringing his troubles to the Lord.

A. When we meet Jacob in Genesis 32, he is filled with fear.

1. Jacob fled his home in Canaan, because he had deceived his father, Isaac, and stolen the blessing that Isaac intended to give to his brother, Esau. After that Esau spoke of murdering his brother and so Jacob fled far away to the home of his mother's relatives. Twenty years later he is returning home and he is afraid of what Esau might do.

2. Jacob isn't just worried only about his life. He has a large family, many children. He is concerned that Esau may murder them too. Jacob had many animals. Would Esau harm them also?

Most importantly Jacob carried the Lord's promise that through his family tree, one day, the Savior of the world would be born. Jacob was very conscious of his sins and that he needed forgiveness before God. If he and his family were wiped out by Esau, did that mean no Savior and no salvation?

Jacob had a lot on his heart and mind and he poured out his thoughts in prayer.

B. Someone might say, "*The Lord should not have let him carry that heavy burden. He is Almighty. The Lord should have just taken care of the problem.*" We might wonder sometimes, "*Why doesn't the Lord take away my troubles as soon as they appear? Doesn't he love me?*"

1. It was because the Lord loved Jacob that he did not immediately fix his problems. Jacob was sinful human being like you and I. One of our tendencies can be that we feel we don't need the Lord, we can fix our own problems. When Esau tried to take the family blessing, though the Lord had promised it was Jacob's inheritance, Jacob took matters into his own hands and deceived his father and stole the blessing.

Did you ever cheat on an exam because you thought it was the best way to bring your grade up? Have you ever lied to a parent, teacher or person in authority because you thought it was the best way to handle a situation. We are just as guilty as Jacob and we too need forgiveness in the Savior.

2. Jacob was in a situation that he could not fix. Esau was coming to meet him with 400 armed men. Jacob realized that the answer was not with himself, but with the Lord. So he prays all night for the Lord's help. Jacob would remember this in the future and instead of relying on himself he would know to go to the Lord in prayer and trust him for an answer.

It is so easy today when we have a problem to run to the internet, or the local super store or even our doctor. We may need to do that, but the Lord wants us to learn that we need to first approach him in prayer. He wants us to grow in our faith that he is the answer to life's troubles. It took Jacob years to learn this lesson, but the Lord graciously and patiently taught him.

2. Don't give up.

An excuse people might offer is, *“Not only did the Lord not take care of a problem when it came into my life, he still hasn’t fixed it, so I gave up praying.”* Jacob shows us that we should never give up praying.

A. Strangest of all the details of this event is that the Lord himself shows up in human form and wrestles with Jacob. So Jacob is wrestling in his mind with the Lord in prayer and with his body at the same time.

1. Jacob couldn’t actually beat the Lord because he is all powerful. But like a dad wrestling on the carpet with his small children, the Lord was happy to engage Jacob in the exercise. Jacob did not disappoint. He would not let the Lord go until he would answer his prayer and bless him. Finally when time was up, the Lord touched Jacob’s hip and dislocate to make it difficult to continue. Even then Jacob held on, until the Lord blessed him.

2. This is more than Jacob just hanging on until he received his blessing. Jacob was learning not only that he could pray to the Lord, but he could persist in prayer and he could trust that the Lord was not ignoring him, but was working on blessing him.

Jesus promises this to us in the Gospel reading, **“And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.”** (Luke 18:7,8a)

B. Jesus was Jacob’s descendent who was the promised Savior.

1. Remember how Jesus persisted in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Three times we see him going and fervently praying for his Father’s blessing. He knew what was at stake. You and I are not only weak in our praying. We selfishly pursue our own path and desires in life. Then we complain to him because of the consequences. Jesus prayed perfectly. Jesus lived perfectly for you and me. Jesus endured the consequences of our sins at the cross. He did this because he loves us and all people. He did this so we can hold our Father close in prayer and not let go until we have an answer.

2. The Lord wants you to wrestle him in prayer. You can do it not because you feel desperate. You do it because you know he hears you and he is working on blessings that will be the perfect help for your needs.

3. Expect his blessing.

We may sometimes be sluggish in our praying because we don't see the Lord's answer. Let's see how the Lord blessed Jacob so we expect his blessings.

A. How did the Lord bless Jacob?

1. If you read the Genesis account, Jacob met Esau and it was a blessed reunion. They were friendly and no one died. I wonder after his wrestling match if Jacob was that concerned about it. After all, why think about Esau when you have seen the face of God and lived!

2. The real blessing was that Jacob was forced to trust the Lord's promises to take care of him. He had to trust that the Lord would provide a Savior for the world. When he came away from the wrestling match, he knew the Lord was near. He knew the Lord cared. He knew the Lord would keep his promises. I would say that coming into contact with the Lord and his promises had driven the fear from Jacob's heart.

3. As an added bonus the Lord gave him a new name, "**Israel.**" The idea behind the name is that Jacob was "**one who struggles with God and men and overcomes.**" The Lord also gave him the limp to remember this event. With these souvenirs, the Lord wanted Israel to always remember that he needed to pray and trust in his gracious God.

B. As I said before, Jesus is speaking to us in the Gospel reading. He promises to hear our cries and answer. What blessings will he send?

1. He is concerned about the situations, the challenges, the illnesses. Before we ask he knows how he wants to deal with them. In the end he will bless us with deliverance here or he will save us to eternal life in heaven. However, his blessings come in his time and his way.

2. The one thing we can be sure of is that he is working in the situation to grow our faith. His silence may mean that he wants us to keep praying. He certainly wants us to go back to his promises and especially to the empty cross and the empty tomb. He reminds us there, "**See how much I love you. Of course I will take care of you, but in the mean time you live by faith.**"

The Lord's love and forgiveness in Word and Sacrament will drive fear from our hearts and increase our faith. This gift is also his answer.

Conclusion: Psalm 50:15 closes with the words, "**and you will honor me.**"

Wrestling in prayer is a way of honoring the Lord. However, we also, while we persist in prayer, want to thank him for prayers answered. We can even honor him by saying, "*You have not answered this prayer yet, but I want to thank you for whatever answer you give, because you will do what is best for me and for your people.*" Persist in prayer thankful for his grace. Amen.