

Have you wrestled with a problem or lost sleep because something was so wrong you couldn't relax? Or have you struggled because you knew what you really needed to do but worried how others might feel about your decision? And other times we struggle because we cannot go back and change mistakes. What is it like in such situations when you toss and turn and keep second guessing yourself? Why is it often so difficult in such moments to find peace?

Genesis recalls a dark night when Jacob struggled on a riverbank. Years earlier he had stolen the family inheritance from brother Esau by deceiving their blind and senile father. Fearing for his life he ran north. Years later he was successful and wealthy and ready to head home. Still fearful that brother Esau was waiting to get revenge, his path stalled at the border. He sent his family across the river but wasn't ready to do the same. He waited all alone, trying to decide. Little did he know what a wrestling match that last dark night would become!

A thousand years later, Jesus once told the story of a struggling poor widow who had no one to defend or protect her. She was being harassed and turned to a crabby old judge for help. He wasn't interested and ignored her pleas. Daily she cried out for mercy to this judge, her only hope for justice. Daily he sent her away. Finally, as she made such a nuisance of herself and wouldn't leave him alone, he finally acted on her behalf.

One night Jacob found himself wrestling with God, even though he didn't know who his adversary was. Somehow, he had always gotten his way. His clever dealings and winning personality always pulled him through. Everything he touched turned to gold, but this night would be different.

The widow of Jesus' parable was seeking justice and could not find it. But finally her persistence would pay off. Jacob and the widow both came to a point where they had to admit they had no control at all. And that becomes a lesson for us. Whether we approach God as a judge, opponent, or a friend, that is where our struggles must always be taken. And prayer is the vehicle of such an encounter.

Prayer is about giving up control. It is embracing and holding on to a loving God who will never let us go. Jacob had been persistent in his control. The woman was persistent in her hope. Likewise, we need realize that in our struggles of life, we are usually wrestling with God. We might not see it that way, but we are. How long will we hang on to the notion that we should get everything we deserve, or life will always be fair? We think we are wrestling with the world, but in fact are fighting the illusion that we should be able to control God.

We understand the power of counseling is in stopping at the riverbank and wrestling with issues we can't hide from any longer. We understand anything

worth having is worth working for. And so we learn, It is often in the struggle that we find the answer, and anything worth having is worth the price we pay.

It is like the dawn of a new day when we discover most of our struggles with uncertainties, fears, and guilt have more to do with faith than anything else! Can you find the same courage as Jacob, to face this head on and surrender to God? Can you find the same strength as this woman to be persistent in standing in front of God knowing that is the only hope for any peace?

The good news is that Jesus is like a tag team partner who took our place and wrestled with a creation gone sour. More perfectly than Jacob, he refused to let go or give up. He wrestled with the pain of broken hopes and dreams as he hung on a cross. In the darkness of the tomb, he struggled with the death that none can escape. He refused to let go in the darkness, and he never quit his struggle with Satan and death. His victory and his example are gifts to us all.

If you haven't figured it out, these texts are about prayer. Prayer is wrestling with God and knowing that is the place for our struggles to be embraced. If we listen and let go, we will always come to a place of peace and the ability to move on. Jacob limped from his encounter with a physical reminder that no one ever leaves a moment with God without being changed. Jesus' story impressed his audience, that if people can find justice in an evil world, they certainly will be granted even more justice from a God of love!

Prayer is a wonderful struggle. In that embrace God touches our confusion, pain, or questions. God wrestles with us (like parent with child) patiently struggling in our darkness and fear. He keeps us close (even when we would flee!) God wraps us in his love like a blanket. And what a blessed peace comes when we understand we never have to cross any river alone!

Prayer is not sign of weakness, but a confession of our faith. In such endeavors we accept God's strength, and through such persistence we are blessed! In prayer, God wrestles with us, to keep us close and to change us with his love.

For years I wrestled with the death of my oldest child. I was disappointed in mistakes I had made and opportunities I had missed. Parenting is never easy, but there was much I wish I had done differently. It was only after much wrestling with God in prayer that I finally was able to let go, accept the gift of forgiveness, and learn from my mistakes. What I couldn't change in the past, I have tried to do differently in how I parent now. I am a work in progress but without prayer I never would have crossed my own riverbank on the journey home.

Jacob's wrestling match was later replayed with Jesus' intense prayer in Gethsemane! And that result was even more fantastic!!! As we trust God's embrace, wrestling changes to servant love, and we are free to embrace others,

knowing that God's touch of love will never let us down or let us go! It always leads to the dawn of a brand new day, and the precious gift of peace.