Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Pray Boldly
Scripture: Luke 11:5-10
Code: 42-157

Open your Bible to Luke chapter 11. We come back to Luke chapter 11, and again the inimitable, and penetrating, and wonderful teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 11:5 and following, a familiar and really unforgettable little story that Jesus tells here. It actually has a lot of humor in it, and while Jesus didn't say things that are actually funny or that make us laugh, we certainly see a warmth of His humor in this story because it's so much like life.

The story begins in Luke 11:5. "And He said to them, 'Suppose one of you should have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey and I have nothing to set before him;" And from inside he shall answer and say, "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you *anything*." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

And I say to you, ask and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened.

Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or *if* he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?' "

Boy, what starts out as a simple story, ends up pretty theological, doesn't it? It starts with the simple and ends up in the profound. A mature believer who has been shaped by Scripture - and that's the only way to be mature - understands the nature of God. Your view of God is really the benchmark of your spiritual maturity. Understanding the nature of God is critical to spiritual maturity because in the end you rest in the reality of your God. Superficial knowledge of God, a shallow knowledge of God, a limited knowledge of God contributes to limited understanding and limited faith and limited trust.

And so, when we talk about spiritual maturity, we're really talking about understanding the nature of God. That is essential. That is to say you understand that God is eternal, that He is powerful, that He is holy, that He is unchangeable, that He is omniscient, that He is omnipresent, that He is purposeful,

that He is sovereign, that He is in perfect control of everything He has created all the time.

Do you understand that God is above and beyond and outside all of the contingencies that go on in the created universe? He is transcendent. He is high and lofty, majestic and lifted up, and He is working to perfection His plan for the universe and for mankind. He has everything under control all the time and He's in perfect knowledge and bringing to pass the plan which He ordained from the very beginning.

In Job 42:2 we read these words, "I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted." Now there's a comment of a mature man. I know that You're in charge of everything and no purpose of Yours can ever be thwarted. Psalm 33:11 says, "The counsel of the Lord stands forever." That is to say what God says is fixed permanently. Nothing God says ever changes because there's never any more information. There's never anything to be clarified, and no circumstance and occur which God doesn't already know about and knew about when He made that declaration.

That's why Psalm 33:11 also says, "The plans of His heart are fixed from one generation to another." From generation to generation the plans of the heart of God stand. Nothing changes because there's no further information, there's no exigency or contingency that God didn't know about, nothing changes. He inexorably and perfectly works His plan through to the end.

In Proverbs 19:21 we read, "Many are the plans of a man's heart, but the counsel of the Lord, it will stand." We change our plans all the time because we get more information, because circumstances change. God never changes anything. His counsel is fixed.

In Isaiah 14:24, "The Lord of host has sworn saying, 'Just as I have intended so it has happened. Just as I have planned so it will stand.' " All these statements about standing have to do with God fixing a purpose which never changes. I intended it and that's how it happens. I planned it and that's how it is and will be.

In Isaiah 46, a little bit more prolonged passage, all of this sort of comes together in very clear terms, Isaiah 46:8. "Remember this, be assured; recall to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God and there is no one like Me, - " and here's the distinction " - declaring the end from the beginning." We can't do that. We don't know the end from the beginning. We can't affirm the end. We can't bring about the end from the beginning. Only God can. That's why He is God. There is no one like Him because there is no one who can tell how it's going to end before it even begins.

He "declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done." And it's not just that He knows how they will happen. It says, "My purpose will be established, I will

accomplish all My good pleasure." From the beginning, God determined the end, He planned the end, and He works to that end. Verse 11 says, "Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass." I have planned it; I will do it. God never alters His plan and the plan was established from the beginning and He works it to the very end.

Jesus in Acts 1:7 said this. "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." "Times and epochs," what does that mean? Chronological time, clock time, calendar time, and epochal time, events. All chronological history and all the events that occur within it are fixed in God's own authority. Everything is determined from the beginning to the end by the purposes of God.

In Acts 4 we read the testimony of those early believers, "For truly - " verse 27 " - in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel - " Everybody got together to kill Jesus. But verse 28 says, "To do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined." What a statement. What a statement. Whatever it is that they did, it was predestined by God and predetermined by His purpose.

Now God is sovereign and God is omnipotent. He knows the plan and He has the power to work the plan. He has perfect knowledge so there's nothing to change the plan. He doesn't need us to give Him more information and He doesn't react to circumstances.

You say, "Why are you telling us all of this?" Because all these realities about God raise the question of how our prayers matter, don't they? Are you getting there? You started to say, "Well, you know, why would I bother to pray? All that seems to squelch my prayer life and my little requests." And, of course, that's one of the accusations that's been made by people who reject reformed theology that if you have a strong view of God, if you have the biblical view of God, it just takes all the heart out of your praying.

I mean, I certainly don't want to bother God, I don't want to interrupt God. I mean, He knows where He's going, knows what He's doing, He doesn't need information from me about anything. And He's not about to change His ultimate plan and design. So if I am told to pray, maybe all I need to do is just kind of go in for a little brief thing and say, "You know, I'm really sorry to bother You, God, I'll just keep this to a minimum. I know You're really busy and I know You've got the deal worked out and You know where it's going but - so I won't be long."

People say that to me all the time to me. "I know you're really busy and I know you've got a lot of things on your mind, but if I could just have a minute - " If people think that that's some kind of intrusion into my life and I haven't got a clue what's coming in the future, when you think about God, we would say to God, "Well, this is ridiculous for me to come and bring my little deal in front of You

when You've got it all worked out from beginning to end. Even the fact that I was born, that I exist, and that I would come to You with this request was known to You before the foundation of the world and it's all in the plan, what's the point? Well, if I do come, I'm going to make it quick and I'll be out." I mean, it's almost embarrassing, isn't it? "Sorry, God, it's me again, and I know I interrupt You a lot with my little things."

But we have to remember that we are told to pray and we just went through that, didn't we? In verses 2-4 didn't we study the disciples prayer 12 weeks long, 3 months? And all of that was teaching us how to pray, how to pray. And that was repeated from a pattern Jesus originally established recorded in Matthew 6, when He was ministering in Galilee many months before this. This is reiterating that same teaching.

But we're still left with this nagging sort of problem, this wonder of how our prayers fit in. And we say, if we have a mature view of God, and a full view of God, and we understand the character of God, and the nature of God, does it really have some kind of a squelching effect on our prayer life?

Well, let me give you an illustration. Let's go back to the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapter 1. Israel is in captivity. God knows that. And the land of Israel and the land of Judah, in particular the southern kingdom and the city of Jerusalem, is in ruins. "The remnant - " 1:3 " - are in great distress, reproach, the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, the gates are burned with fire." God knows all that. In fact, God made sure that happened because God brought, you remember, the Babylonians to be His executioner to bring judgment on Israel for idolatry. So God knows all of that.

But I want you to still see the response of Nehemiah, verse 4. "Now it came about when I heard these words - " got a report back about the condition of Jerusalem " - I sat down and wept and mourned for days." It didn't change the heartbreak. Just because God knew all of this and Nehemiah knew God knew it didn't change how Nehemiah felt. "And I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven."

You say, "Well maybe he didn't have a very good idea. Maybe he didn't really understand who God was and he was getting over-exercised, and fasting, and praying, and weeping, and mourning, and he's really a highly emotional condition here. Maybe he just doesn't kind of know that God is in charge. Maybe he's just really a loose Arminian floating around in the Old Testament."

But look at his prayer in verse 5. "I said, 'I beseech Thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments." Yeah, he understood God. He understood God, that God was sovereign Lord. He understood His greatness, His awesomeness, all the attributes that fill up those terms. He understood that He had a covenant and that He was faithful to that covenant. He understood His grace and His loving kindness to those that love Him and keep His commandments. He understood all of that and still in verse 6, "Let Thine ear now be attentive and Thine eyes opened to hear the prayers of Thy

servant which I am praying before Thee now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel."

And you know this, when you read this in context, it makes you just a little bit squeamish. I mean, have you ever talked to God like that. Have you ever said, "God, listen to me. I'm talking to you. Open your eyes and check out my situation." I don't think I've ever said that to God. And not only did he say it once, he says, "I am praying before You day and night, fasting, weeping, mourning, praying before the God of heaven," whom He fully understands. He's really storming the gates. He's saying, "God, open Your ear and open Your eyes and look at the situation." That's pretty bold stuff, isn't it? It's almost embarrassing.

You know, we sort of go into God's presence. "You know, it's me again, Lord. Oh I just - whatever is Your will. Please let's get that out of the way at the beginning. That's where I am. You know, I know You've got other things to attend to so I'll understand if You can't be bothered with this little - " That's not Nehemiah's approach. "God, you know, wake up. Take a look. Come on."

Look at Psalm 17:1. "Hear a just cause, O Lord, give heed to my cry; Give ear to my prayer." "Listen to me, God." These people that pray in the Old Testament demanded a hearing with God. Psalm 27:7 - these are illustrations, there are many more. Psalm 27:7, "Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, - " Listen to me when I'm talking to you, God. "And be gracious to me - " and look at this " - answer me." Have you ever said that to God? I'm telling you, God, you better listen to me and I want an answer. Answer me.

Psalm 55 adds another component, "Give - " verse 1. "Give ear to my prayer, O God; And do not hide Yourself from my supplication." Don't you be hiding anywhere. I'm talking to you. It's amazing. "Give heed to me and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and I am surely distracted." I'm telling you things aren't going right, and You need to listen to me, and don't you be going off and hiding somewhere. Pay attention. It sounds like my kids talk to me like that when I'm distracted.

Psalm 102 is another one, and again those are samples I'm giving you. "Hear my prayer, O Lord! And let my cry for help come to Thee. Do not hide Thy face from me in the day of my distress; incline Your ear to me." Again it's that same sort of demanding, it's almost rude. It's almost rude. Be like somebody coming up to you and saying, "Look. I want to talk to you. Listen to me. I want to talk to you. Look at me. Don't you be distracted." You'd say, "Well, wait a minute here."

Psalm 143 adds one other component, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, - " Psalm 143:1, " - Give ear to my supplications! Answer me in Thy faithfulness, in Thy righteousness!" And I love the next one, "And do not enter into judgment with Thy servant." I don't want a discussion. I don't want you to be upset with me. Just cool your anger and just listen. Amazing way to talk to God. Amazing. I'm shocked by some of this, the boldness of it, the brashness of it.

When I was growing up as a kid, my grandmother used to have this little saying. I don't hear it much anymore. My mom picked it up and carried it on. She said, "Well, Johnny, that took a lot of gall." Did you ever hear anybody say that? "That took a lot of gall." I don't know where that came from. You look up "gall" in the dictionary, I don't know how they connect. But my mom would say, "That took a lot of nerve." It's like you've stepped over the boundaries of rudeness, you've gone too far.

You say, "Well, what is the point in talking to God like that? If you know God is sovereign, and you know God is all wise, and all powerful, and all knowing, and has purposed everything from the beginning to the end and all the way through the middle, what in the world is the point of praying?" And the answer is because God has not only ordained the end, He has ordained the means to the end. And I don't know about you, but I'd rather be a part of God's means than anything else.

I suppose I could be a spiritual couch potato and not care whether I participated as the means which God uses to reach His end. But I'd much rather be engaged and involved in being the means because the residual impact to me is wonderful, it is His goodness and blessing in this life and eternal reward in the life to come. It's not about changing God's mind. It's not about changing God's plans. It's not about giving Him information He doesn't have. It's not about a tweaking of the circumstances that He might not have anticipated. It's simply about being used by God.

The Old Testament - I'll give you an illustration - the Old Testament prophet said Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Well, that's the end, and it had to be. He couldn't be born anywhere else or the whole Old Testament would have been discredited. The prophet would have been wrong. How was Jesus born in Bethlehem? Because Caesar Augustus, who didn't know anything about Malachi or Jesus, determined a census to be taken in Israel and everybody had to go to his own original hometown to register for the census, Luke 2.

And so Joseph and Mary had to go down to Bethlehem at exactly the time of the census, which is exactly the time when she delivered the baby. The Messiah was born in Bethlehem. The end was in the plan of God from the very beginning as articulated by the prophet in the Old Testament. The means was an ignorant Caesar making a decree. God uses the means as well as determines the end.

And in Acts chapter 2 where Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost, he says, "You killed the Son of God by the predetermined, the determinative will and plan of God." The means of our salvation - God determined that Christ would be the sacrifice for our salvation. The means, Roman soldiers, and all the things that went into it.

Like everything else, look, God determined your salvation from before the foundation of the world. The means is through your faith and repentance. You will not be saved without faith. You will not be

sanctified without obedience. And you will not enjoy the goodness of God in this life without participating in prayer in the accomplishing of the divine purposes. I can't think of anything more wonderful than God allowing me to be a means to His ends. It's incredible. I don't want to change God.

Let me tell you right now, I don't want to change anything. I can't. It would be ridiculous to think of it. But that would be to assume that I had a better idea, and that's absolute idiocy. But to think that God could use me, totally ignorant of the future, totally inept, to be a means by which He achieves His eternal ends, and then not only bless me for that but reward me forever, beyond belief.

That's why the Bible tells us to pray. Prayer is the means by which God's infinite wisdom, infinite power, and perfect purpose are brought together to accomplish His will. You can't be saved without believing. You can't be sanctified without obeying. And you can't enjoy the goodness of God in this life without participating in His unfolding purpose through your prayers and through your service to Him. That's what we're going to see in this story.

Drop down to verse 8. You notice in verse 8 the word "persistence." That's in the NAS. I don't know what other versions have. Some Bibles say "importunity." There's a word nobody ever uses, "importunity." That's a good word. If you ever get a chance to look at it in the dictionary, this is what you'll find. Importunity is different than opportunity. We all use "opportunity" all the time because that kind of works for us in our every day language. "Opportunity" is a word the dictionary says it means "a circumstance favorable to us." You see what appears to be a circumstance favorable to you and you take advantage of it. You move into that circumstance to achieve in that opportunity what it is that you think is available for you there, that's opportunity.

"Importunity" is not that at all. It's something different. "Opportunity" simply means you move into a favorable circumstance. "Importunity" is far stronger. It is a word that has urgency and persistence in it, but it's bigger than the word "persistence." Some dictionaries translate it this way: "Troublesomely urgent, overly persistent." It's a hyper word or even "annoyingly relentless."

What happened here was this guy finally got out of bed and gave the man what he wanted because he was annoyingly persistent. He was overly persistent. He was troublesomely urgent. It's the word in the Greek *anaideian*, it's hapax legomena, that is, once said in the New Testament, the only place it ever appears. And really what it means - and you might see this in your marginal reading in the NAS - is "shamelessness, somebody who just sets aside all sense of shame." It's, one lexicon said, "overly bold." Another one said, "utter shamelessness." Somebody who is just brash, and bold, somebody who has a lot of nerve. Are we supposed to pray like that?

That's what Jesus is going to teach us here to pray like that, and thus to participate in the means by which God achieves His ends. Let's start with the parable. Okay, we'll look at two points today, and I

was going to do the whole thing, but that never happens. So I'm living under an illusion in my old age.

Luke 11:5, Jesus just jumps right in. The subject is prayer. He just taught them how to pray, still on the same subject, probably in the same location at the same time. "And He said to them - " because He knew this question would come up. If God has His kingdom, and God has His will, and God has His purpose, and all of this, what - you know, there's this nagging wonder about why do we pray? And maybe we just pray, you know, these little sort of tepid, brief, quick in-and-out prayers, not to interrupt God at all. Now He tells the story.

"Suppose one of you should have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and you say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves.' " Now the teaching on prayer raises the question: shouldn't we be reluctant or a little ashamed to bother God with our troubles since, you know, He's going to do what He's going to do? So here's the illustration. Jesus jumps back into daily life, very simple, unforgettable story. Suppose you have, a *philos*, a friend, somebody that you have an affection for. It means "a neighbor."

Now in Israel, as in other parts of the world in ancient times and in third world countries today, people in places where they don't have a lot are dependent upon their neighbors. They're dependent on each other. They sort of survive together. You make enough bread for the day, you eat the bread that day, and then it's gone. The next day you make bread again. You might have a supply of grain and you might have a supply of oil, like the widow in the Old Testament, but you don't have preservatives, and you don't have a stockpile of food. You don't have an AM PM Store, and you don't have food shops that are certainly open at night, and you don't have access to that, so, you know, it's the battle for bread every day. And that's the way it was.

So here's a man who has a neighbor and goes to him at midnight. This is the worst time for a visit. I hate when people come to see me at midnight. I don't care what they want. That's not a good time to come. And by the way, there was no TV in those days, so there was no late night anything. When darkness came, you basically stayed around a little bit with the light of a candle, then you went to sleep because you had to start work at 6 A.M. in the morning. That's when the work day began. And so nobody's awake at midnight.

And it says here this man goes to his friend at midnight and says to him - he comes to his house probably in a close little community and he starts yelling his name. "Hey, hey, hey, it's me." And he's waking him up, obviously. "Friend, friend," it's always good to say that when you've done that, just to rehearse - hopefully that you can make him feel some sense of well being that you consider him a friend. It's a sensible greeting if you've just arrived uninvited at midnight and becoming a nuisance in somebody's life. I'm still pretty convinced it would only slightly ease the irritation, if at all.

"Lend me three loaves." Now he doesn't mean three great big bakery loaves, like we're used to. A loaf would be basically one piece of flat bread. He wants three pieces of flat bread, which would be a

normal meal dipped in perhaps some kind of olive oil, or spread with some kind of fruit, or whatever. This would be sufficient for an evening meal.

Now this is not an emergency. He isn't saying, "My wife is having a baby. My wife is dying. My kid broke his leg. We've got a robber in the house." He's in the middle of the night and he says, "I want these three loaves." And the guy is probably thinking, "What in the world? He is waking me up for a midnight snack. This is ridiculous." Actually, it's a very generous and unselfish act on his part because he's been awakened himself.

Because verse 6 says, "For a friend of mine has come." I'm just passing on the joy here. "Friend of mine has come to me from a journey and I have nothing to set before him." People often traveled at night in that hot part of the world, and his friend came at midnight, and he had to get up and host him. He arrived unexpectedly.

Hospitality, by the way, was expected in the ancient world, very much expected among the Jewish people. They majored on hospitality. It was part of their social duty, more a part of their religious duty. Part of their duty to God to care for the stranger, right? I mean, that's Old Testament stuff. They knew what they had to do. And so this poor man who had this guest arrive at midnight at his house, he had sort of a difficult dilemma: I can be a poor host or a poor neighbor, right?

Being a poor host was not an option because hospitality was at the high level of priorities in cultural considerations. And he knew his neighbor knew it, as well. So both of then would really be doing what's right, even though it was a bit inconvenient for both of them. So he says, "It's really not for me. I don't want a midnight snack. It's a friend of mine that's come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him." He's obviously hungry, hasn't had anything to eat, no shops, restaurants, no stockpile of food, nothing. Very different, by the way, from our world, isn't it? When you just make it every day with the bread you have.

And there's a rather predictable response, verse 7, "And from inside he shall answer - " This conversation's going on through the wall here. "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." Now this is exactly what you would expect. You know, it would be hard for me to do what the man did. I don't know, I think I would maybe end up a poor host.

Patricia would tell you, you know, that I don't like to bother people. You know, and if I was in this situation and she was saying, "Now you've got this guest. Go to the neighbor and get some food." I'd say, "You go. I don't want to go." I don't know what it is, but I don't like to bother people. She would say, "That's what I would expect you to say." But he went and the guy has a predictable response. "Don't bother me. Stop causing me trouble. What are you doing?"

“The door has already been shut.” It wasn’t a door like we have that you shut it easily. Sometimes doors actually dropped through rings, a combination of metal and iron, and removing it was not just a simple thing to do, and opening would make a lot of racket. And there was a whole family there. And he says, “My children and I are in bed.” Usually the same bed. They had a big mat, one-room houses, right? One-room houses. The kitchen in one corner, living space over here, and bedroom in the same place. Just roll out the mat and everybody goes down on the mat with some pillows, or whatever. And the colder it got, the closer they all got together. That’s how they all kept themselves warm.

So if he gets up, everybody’s up, all the kids are up, everybody’s up. And probably by now the people living close next door are up because they’re listening to the conversation, as well. The whole thing seems very presumptuous, very bothersome. It really isn’t a big emergency. I mean, couldn’t he - would he die if he waited till breakfast? Isn’t he - aren’t you a little bit overdoing this hospitality thing? Tell the guy to go to bed. You’ll forget it when you fall asleep. You know, give him a speech. You’ve been on a long journey. You’re probably tired. Just lay down. You’ll fall asleep and you’ll forget. The man says, “I’m not going to get up and give you anything. This is too much trouble.”

And then Jesus, skipping any prolonged narrative, jumps to the point of the story in verse 8. “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence - ” his importunity, his brashness, his boldness “ - he will get up and give him as much as he needs.” There’s really no sense in not getting up because he’s not going away. And you’ve already awakened me, and you’ve already awaken the kids.

I tell you, he’s going to get what he asks for because of his shamelessness. That’s the word, *anaideian*, because of his shamelessness, his brashness, his gall. The emphasis here is on this boldness. It isn't so much on persistence and much asking, it’s just the boldness of asking at such an inopportune time, just took a lot of gall to do this.

Well, it’s a perfect illustration. It’s just a perfect illustration of us going to God and saying, “I know it’s inappropriate to interrupt You because You’re running a universe and You’ve got all these things going. But I just need You to sit down and listen to me, and look at this, and don’t be distracted. I’ve got some things I need to - ” That is just - that’s over the top.

But it isn’t. The picture here is of shameless nerve, boldness, importunity, things that seem almost ludicrous to us going into the presence of the God of the universe. But our Lord is teaching us how to be invasive, how to be bold in our prayers. This man responded not for friendship, but for irritation. He is in contrast to God who, by the way, the Old Testament says, “Never sleeps and never - ” what? “ - slumbers.” So you’re not waking Him up. And if this man would give this man what he wanted not for friendship, but just because of his shameless boldness, what will God who loves you perfectly give you when you come into His presence?

And so the parable leads to this incredible promise in verses 9 and 10, and this is over the top. Listen to this. “And I say to you - ” I love that. *Eg* is in the emphatic position. “And I say to you - ” this isn’t somebody’s opinion, folks. This is the incarnate God speaking, okay? “I say to you - ” this is the voice of absolute divine authority. “I say to you - ” I want to hear this. What are You saying? He doesn’t say, “Don’t you dare come and bang around in God’s presence demanding things.”

I would expect Him to say that. “You better back off. Don’t you be like that guy. Don’t you come interrupting God. He knows your need. He knows what’s going on. Doesn’t need information from you. He can read your heart. He can see your concern.” He doesn’t say that at all. He says the opposite. “Feel free,” verse 9. “I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened.” That is unbelievable, isn’t it?

Three imperative verbs, present imperative. Keep on asking, keep on pursuing, keep on knocking. Don’t hesitate at all to be bold. Don’t be embarrassed. Ask. That’s kind of the first level. “Psst, God, it’s me.” Seek. That’s the second level. *Zte*, it means “to strive” after or “to demand.” “God, I’m telling You, You’ve got to listen to me now. You’ve got to watch what’s going on here. Don’t be distracted.” Knock. Now you’re storming the gates of heaven. Don’t be reluctant to ask, and to get aggressive, and to bang on heaven’s door.

Did you ever think about prayer like that? Just drawn out of that little story? It’s just amazing. James says, “you have not because - ” what? “ - you don’t ask.” Or you ask to consume it on your own lust, or you ask double minded, not really believing, or you ask out of a disobedient heart and you have forgotten that God hears the prayers of those who obey His commandments, or you say, “Wait a minute. Isn’t this a blank check? Come on. You can’t just ask, seek, knock and you’ll receive.”

Well, is this a blank check? No. It’s already been qualified by verses 2-4, hasn’t it? Here’s how you pray. “Father, hallowed be - ” what? “ - Your name, Your kingdom come - ” and then we add, of course, from Matthew 6, “Your will be done.” So it’s always according to God’s name, according to God’s kingdom, and according to God’s will that we ask. It’s not a blank check.

The generosity of the statement in verses 9 and 10 is absolutely amazing. And because verse 9 is so shocking, verse 10 repeats the same thing. It’s not necessary to say the same thing twice, especially when you don’t really change anything. But he does because of the first verse, verse 9, just sort of leaves you stunned. “Come on,” God says, “you can start whispering if you want through the wall, and you can raise your voice and begin to make demands, and you can even bang on the door, if you want, and I’ll tell you this. When you ask, you’ll find; and when you knock you will receive what you desire. I will open the door.” What a great statement.

Jeremiah 29:12-13, and we'll kind of close with those two. Jeremiah 29:12-13. Don't leave just because I said that. Jeremiah 29:11, this is so good. "For I know the plans that I have for you." Isn't that good? That's sovereignty, isn't it? " 'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare not for calamity to give you a future and hope.' " "I know what I have planned for you." There is an affirmation of God's perfect knowledge, perfect sovereignty, and working out His purpose.

But in verse 12 He then says, "Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart." In a sense the two seem like they contradict. "I know My plans, they're set, they're fixed, they're good. But I'm telling you, come and pray and I'll make you a part of the means of the fulfillment of those plans when you seek Me with all your heart."

And what comes out of this? I'll tell you what comes out of this, an experience of the goodness of God. An experience of communion with God. This is the richness of what we enjoy in this life and in the life to come, the eternal reward for being eager participants in the purposes of God. Next time you pray, be bold. Next time you pray, which should be at all times, praying without ceasing, be shameless. Next time you pray, go into the presence of God eager to pour out your heart. Next time you pray, ask God to listen and to see, and not to turn away, and to hear the cry of your heart. And as you pray and God unfolds His purpose, you will be enjoying the experience of having been a part of what He accomplishes and enjoy His goodness.

This concept, this great truth, this great promise is built on a sort of axiom, an obvious principle, and that is built on a divine foundation. And we'll see those two things next time. Join me in prayer.

Father, we thank You this day for such incredible generosity. What can we say? It is just beyond comprehension. We thank You that we can come into Your glorious presence, like Nehemiah, fully understanding who You are and yet praying, fasting, weeping, pleading that we might be a part of the means by which You achieve Your ends. What a privilege that we can enjoy such an experience and such blessing firsthand, both now and forever. We thank You in the name of Christ.

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