

You guys can be seated. Good to see you all this morning. Hey, if you are wondering why there are a ton of pink flowers here, our Daddy Daughter dance was Did. Did. Was that mentioned earlier today already.

Listen, it was a fantastic success. How many of you guys were here? That is so. We had so many great volunteers. We had over a hundred dads and their kids show up for this thing, which was incredible.

Plenty of food. We ended up taking extras to the men's warming shelter. So not just dads and their daughters got to enjoy some great food, but some of the men in our community got to enjoy it as well. It was a great time. These are the table decorations.

We were going to give them away that night. I'm not sure why we didn't, but we're going to give them away today. So if you would love. Guys, this is a great way to make up for whatever you didn't do on Valentine's Day. At the end of the service, these will be available.

I'm going to have Samantha to come up and help distribute this. But if you want one of these lovely arrangements, all you do is show up. Easy as that. Hey. Yeah.

We didn't meet last week, so you may have forgotten what we're talking about. We're in a series called Prayer and we're trying to get real practical with prayer. So we're glad you're here this morning. In my previous role at the Bloomington campus, I was the worship director. And in that role, I got to help host several amazing Christian bands who came through and led worship.

Every contract we signed with these bands, and there were usually some contracts came with something called a rider. Are you familiar with what a rider is? So a rider is this document that a performer sends with their requirements for the performance. And most are very practical, usually how much amperage you've got so that their equipment doesn't blow up. Sometimes it's the amount of square space you have on your stage.

Sometimes it's the weight allowance on your stage, especially if those are temporary. Some of them are really personal, like this kind of brand of water, this kind of fruit. Don't do kiwis. You know, that sort of thing. No green MMs.

Anyone ever heard that? I never encountered the no green M and Ms. Thing, but we would have done it if they had asked. Some of them are pretty awesome requirements in the Writer. So George Clooney, I don't know if you heard of this guy, but he's an actor in Hollywood.

I understand George Clooney. During the filming of one of his films required that a private beach hut be built for him to relax in during sets. Not just a beach hut, but he wanted a full basketball court so

he could invite his buddies over and play basketball in between takes and get some exercise while he was on set. Now when you're a big name band or a big name actor, you can get away with some big name demands. But none of us in this room are George Clooney quality.

I'm going to call out someone though. We have a.

Wait, hold on. What is it? Not astrophysicist, not nuclear physicist. We have a nuclear physicist in the room, ladies and gentlemen. I'm not going to tell you who you are, you just get a guess.

It's not Alan Burris, I will tell you that right now. But even he's not George Clooney, so he doesn't get to make some big name demands. And yet Jesus says to us something pretty incredible. Jesus says, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. I don't know about you, but that's a pretty good writer that he asked us to sign. Jesus seems to encourage us not to be shy about letting him know about our concerns, our needs, and get this, even our wants.

Now in this series, I said we're going to get real practical about prayer. So last week, well, the week before last, we talked about the various ways God speaks to us and the importance of listening as he communicates with us through his word and through other means. Frank Laubach says this prayer at its highest is a two way conversation. And the most important part is listening to God's replies. I've always said if 90% of our prayer life was just listening, we're probably still talking too much.

But having said that, Jesus is really clear. He wants us to to talk to him. He wants us to bring our concerns to him. So today we're gonna get real practical about how to ask, how to seek, how to knock, about the things that matter to us. So I'm gonna pray, and as I'm praying, I'm gonna give you permission to keep your eyes open and if you have a Bible to open it to Luke chapter 18.

If you have a Bible app, open up your Bible app on your phone and turn to Luke chapter 18. If you don't have a Bible app or a Bible, you give you permission to scoot next to someone who does so that you can look over their shoulder and read as we're reading. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, as we open your word today, we pray that you would instruct us on this important matter of prayer. You tell us to do this without ceasing, and yet some of us have a hard time managing it once a week.

So we need to get better about this and help us. You want us to do this so we know that you are. You are more invested in us, in this aspect of your communication with us than we are. So we pray for your

help this morning. Open your word to us.

Encourage us by your spirit, in Jesus name, Amen. So if you're in Luke 18 or you're there not there yet, I'm going to go ahead and get started with this. It talks about a widow. Now, widows in the Bible are not celebrities who can demand special water and green M&Ms. They are some of the most vulnerable.

They're some of the most overlooked people in the culture. With no husband, they had absolutely no standing. They were often mistreated by their other family members. And here's what's happening in this little story that Jesus will tell us. This widow was experiencing some hardship.

So in Luke 18, verses 1 through 8, here's how it goes. And I've got the words up there in case you don't have either, so you can read along up on the screen. Jesus then tells his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. Remember this verse. This is important.

Here's the parable. In a certain town, there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. There was a widow in the town who kept coming to him with the plea, grant me justice against my adversary. For some time he refused, but finally he said to himself, even though I don't fear God or care what people, I don't know why he has an English accent. That's not relevant to the point.

Even though I don't care, I don't fear God or care what people think. Well, now he just sounds like Boss Hogg. Okay. Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually come and attack me.

And then the Lord said, listen to what the unjust judge says. 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. However, when the Son of man comes.

Will he find faith on the earth? Now, growing up, I found this parable a little bit perplexing. Maybe I should have used special voices to tell it. But here's what I always struggled with. One.

We have this. This. Well, we have this Boss Hog type of judge. Anyone here a Dukes of Hazzard fan? Remember this?

Yeah. If you're over the age of 40. You know, Dukes of Hazzard. 50 now, I think. So Boss Hogg was sort of the criminal.

He was a. He was a doofus, but he was the criminal in the story. But we have a judge who's sort of like this. He's only out for himself.

But then we have old Widow Jenkins, and she's experiencing some unnamed injustice.

Maybe some corrupt developer is trying to take her land away from her. And this widow, Widow Jenkins, is beating a path to the door of Boss Hogg, calling him late at night, showing up at weird times, interrupting his cocktail parties with all his fancy celebrity friends, like George Clooney. She says, listen, you have the power to help me. Please do something. And this happens so long that the judge starts to get unnerved, to put it gently.

He starts to worry that she's going to take justice into her own hands and go after him. And so finally, he gives her what she asked for. And young Timmy Thompson said, wait, is this the lesson? Is the lesson that if I just hound God long enough, he'll relent and give me something that I want or need? Is this the approach, the one that Jesus wants me to have, have towards prayer?

Now, remember the very first verse we read. This is Jesus commentary on the story that he's going to tell. And here's. Here's what. Remember what it said.

It said this. Jesus tells the disciples a parable to show them what? That they should always pray and not give up. That's the point of this story here. You see, the judge may be corrupt, but God, he will see that justice gets done and quickly.

But get this. Petitioning him continually until he answers is not only allowed, it's encouraged. It's encouraged. This is what God wants us to do, Petition him over and over and over and over again. Now, don't get crazy.

Don't. Widow Jenkins will tell you that's not the approach. But get serious and keep praying. According to Jesus, the most important thing about prayer is keeping at it. And he uses some funny and even comical images in his stories, his parables, to describe this.

So in Luke 18, the one we just read, he uses this sort of dirty Rotten scoundrel judge to do the right thing to get you out of their hair. You know, that's this funny image that he tells. But in Luke 11, just a few chapters earlier, he tells a story about a friend who shows up late at night on some guy's porch and starts beating on his door asking for food. Like, okay, if you were hungry, I want you. If you're gonna be on my door to determine that at about 6:30, I can help you at 6:30, at 2:00 in the morning, I'm thinking you can wait till breakfast.

But this is the story Jesus tells. Keep knocking until the friend answers and gives you something to eat. In Matthew 7, Jesus tells His story about a dad. We've got some great, amazing dads in our

congregation, but even they have their weaknesses. And Jesus tells about a dad who's kind of crummy, quite honestly.

But he says, even the crummy dads, if their son asks for a bologna sandwich, he doesn't give him a sack full of rocks or a sack full of snakes. No, he. He tries to give the kid what he wants. And. And Jesus says, how much more will God, who loves you so much, want to give you good things as well?

And that's the point. None of us are George Clooney, but we're better than that. We are children of the King. We're the prince. What are the prince.

What's the prince? Prince. Who's going to be the king? William. We're the Prince William of this story and the Princess Kate of this story.

We hold a very special position. And our dad, the King, says, come to me. But why? Why pray at all? After all, doesn't Matthew say.

Matthew 6 says, Your father knows what you need before you ask him. So why do we have to ask him? Maybe a couple of reasons that I can think of. One, because God seems to enjoy being asked. You know, as a parent, you sort of get it, you know, what your kids need.

But sometimes it's like, hey, ask me and I will be happy. I will turn over the world to get you what you need. But I need you to initiate this ask because I'm not going to just throw it at you. You need to let me know, especially when you're anxious about something. I can't force stuff out.

I talked to one of the boys yesterday about something that they were dealing with. And I said, are you nervous about it? And I said, I'm not afraid of anything. I go, okay, okay, sure. I know you're not good on you, but if you want to talk about it, here's what I'm offering.

Some experience that comes with wisdom and age and making my own sorts of mistakes. I'm happy to help. And this is how God wants us to understand him as well. He says, come to me with all this stuff flipping says this. Don't be anxious about anything.

Don't live in that spot. But in every situation, even the ones that you're not afraid of, in every situation, with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And what happens in that moment. The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Talking about it with your dad kind of brings you out of that space and brings someone else in, someone who knows what they're talking about.

You go, okay, I'm not alone in this. I can breathe. It's going to be all right. I can sleep at night now. This is the peace of Christ which

guards your heart.

And he says to do this. This coming to him with this stuff without ceasing. In first Thessalonians. Do it without ceasing. So that's the first reason, really, because he likes to be asked.

The second reason is this. It keeps us close to him when we are continually praying. If I were to guess, the without ceasing part is really there because God likes us to stay close. Be persistent. Jesus says, not because you have to beat a path to God's door before God will open it, but Frederick Buechner says this.

Do it. Be persistent. Because until you beat the path to God's door, there may not be an avenue back to your door. Does that make sense to anyone? There's these things in our brain.

I'm going off script here. There's these things in our brain called neural pathways. And here's what happens. When we use these neural pathways a lot. They form really strong superhighways.

If we never use them, they're always just little bitty goat trails. Now, goat trails can be expanded on and made bigger. Every time we bring these anxious thoughts to God, that little goat trail becomes bigger and bigger and bigger till this becomes a natural part of the way we live. And we then begin to live in this place where we are anxious for nothing. Well, we are living in this place where the peace of Christ is guarding our heart and mind continually.

Because we are continually using that superhighway. We are continually using that path that we have taken to get to God. And God is able then to bring into our hearts and our minds a new way of living. Okay, I'm back on script. Listen, Jesus says, God says, draw near to me, and I will draw near to you.

There's this giving back and forth here. You beat a path to my door, and I will run to your door. Going to God in consistent prayer means that he can also come to us in the same way. And when he shows up, the scary stuff isn't so scary. The peace of God guards our hearts and minds until the answer to our prayer comes.

So I think that's the second reason to keep us close to him. The third reason is this persistent prayer is clarifying. You guys ever clarified butter over the stove? What happens? That butter, that milky substance separates, and you get some really clear, clear clarity on what.

What you're going to use to dip your lobster in. So persistent prayer helps us clarify both what we want and why we want it. So I asked Robert if I could share this story, and he gave me permission, so I'm going to use it. So a couple of months ago, Robert wanted a dirt bike.

Now he wanted a dirt bike for his birthday.

But a dirt bike is expensive, and that is far beyond our birthday allowance money. So I said this. If you will start saving your money over the month of February, I will do a 50 cent to your dollar match. So for every dollar you save, I'll match it \$0.50. So at the end, if you save \$300, how much money would I throw in?

How much? 150. Someone said 350. I'm like, oh, no, no, no, no, no, we're not. We don't live in that world, kids.

That's new math. Yeah. So I thought, okay, this is good. So he's like, okay, I'm into that. In the process of trying to save money and realizing that there's lots of other things he wants, he decided he brought his wish list down.

Instead of a dirt bike, which is a 3000, how about just a minibike, which is a couple of hundred? Oh, yeah, that's fine. That's fine. That's great. If that's what you want, that's perfect.

Okay. Okay, we're going. We're in mini bike zone. Well, so last night he comes home with his friends, and he's wearing this nice new pair of shoes. He says, what do you think about my shoes?

I said, those look great. And he goes, how much do you think they were? I said, I don't know, 60 bucks. I still live in 1982. I know that 60 bucks.

He said, these were 160 bucks. Like, what he Goes, yeah, I decided I didn't want the mini bike. Okay, okay, so here's. This is the point I'm telling you is because persistent prayer sort of works the same way. In the course of praying for something over and over and over again, we decide and we learn what really is important and what really matters.

At the end of the day, Robert was more interested in some really nice shoes. And they're good shoes, they're very useful shoes. I think he made a pretty wise decision, actually. With that money, he's unliable to break his neck or his shoulders or get a concussion in those shoes. So I'm happy with that decision.

But. But it took a while to get there. And we're like that with our own prayers. If we got what we wanted as soon as we asked for it, I guarantee our lives, our garages, our hearts, our minds would be filled up with a ton of stuff that we don't really want and we don't really need. So persistently praying over time could be God's way of sort of slow rolling us, saying, okay, I'm not gonna answer just yet.

I'm gonna let you work this out a little bit. In the process of persistent prayer praying, we clarify in our own minds the what and

the why of our request. I've prayed a thousand prayers one time. When I didn't get it, I moved on. I've prayed a hundred prayers several times, like, okay, I've prayed one prayer a thousand times.

This really matters to me, Lord. This really matters to me. This really matters to me. This really matters to me. I pray it, I pray it, I pray it, I pray it, I pray it, I pray it, I pray it, I pray it.

Eventually, God answers or God doesn't, because I've not clarified it quite yet. Here's what happens when we pray that one prayer a thousand times. It gets focused into something. It gets clarified into something that is much closer to God's perfect and pleasing will that we talked about last week. So persistency in prayer isn't so much about convincing God.

It is clarifying to us what our real need is. And I believe it's the way God uses us to get us closer and closer to his will. So here's the question. So what do we pray about? Well, we pray about everything the scripture says.

But one of those things is kind of, what do I want God to do? What's a dream of mine in my life? God gives us these dreams and desires. Now, not all of them are. This is why praying through it sometimes hones that desire down to where we really are praying about the thing God wants us to pray about.

But this is something we can pray about things that we want God to do. We can also pray about the things that God's that's weighing us down, the things that keeping us up at night. You may say, well, I don't really want to bother God with that. It's not that big a deal. Corrie Ten Boom said something that I think is so fascinating.

Corrie Ten Boom was a survivor of World War II concentration camps. And out of that, her faith just grew so strong. And she developed an amazing witness and ministry over in the second part of her life. And here's what she said about little things that aren't a big deal. She goes, any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be made into a burden.

So if you are concerned about something, it is big enough to be turned into a prayer. Okay? Philippians again says, don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, every situation, present your request to God. So pray about it. Things are weighing you down.

Maybe it's something that God wants you to start, something God wants you to stop. Maybe something God wants you to see through. It gets tough sometimes to do what God tells you to do and ask you to do. And maybe God wants you to pray about that persistence, not just in prayer, but in and doing what he's asked you to do. And this really comes down to, okay, God, what is my responsibility in this situation?

What do you want me to do? Do you want me to start something? You want me to stop something? Do you want me to keep going with something? Are there changes in my life that I need to take the initiative on, habits that I need to stop, disciplines that I need to embrace, pray about those things.

And then the last thing to pray about is what are God's things to handle? Where do I just need to rest and trust God in this thing? You know, our job is to pray. It's God's job to work. And he will work all things together for good to those that love him and are called to serve his purpose.

But our job is to pray. His is to work. Resist the temptation to make something happen when you're praying about it, if you're praying about it, resist the urge to go beating down doors or knocking down walls. If you're praying about it. Let God do the work.

So. So God gets the glory. Now here's where we get to the real practical stuff. I'm sorry, Charlotte. This is something I feel like you need to listen.

I'm sorry, you're leaving the room. Here's the practical stuff. God hears our prayers, but prayer can feel a lot like talking to yourself. Okay, can I just get real honest with you? You may be in the room right now and you're like, okay, Tim, I know I'm here because I'm supposed to be here, but this prayer stuff, all this spiritual stuff is just really out in far left field for me.

I don't know about this. Prayer is just a much of mumbo jumbo. It's just talking to yourself. Maybe you've said that. Maybe even as a person of faith, you've been praying, thinking.

I feel like my prayers are going right to the ceiling and bouncing right back down. I'm just talking to myself. So let me just be honest with you. With you. Yes, it can.

And yes, in some sense it is. Prayer is talking to yourself and asking God to listen in. Can we just roll with that definition for just a little bit? Because it's important. I'm going to encourage you, if you're not, if you're new to praying, to talk to yourself out loud and ask God to listen in.

Okay? That's prayer. What do you talk about? Talk about your life. Talk about what you've done right, what you did wrong, what you want to do better next time.

Talk about the people that you love and you care about. Talk about the people that you have a real hard time with. Talk about those people again. Buechner says, talk about what matters most to you. Because if

you don't, you may forget what matters most to you.

To you. I think that's interesting. Talk out loud and ask God to listen. Because even if you feel like nobody else is listening, at least you are listening. Sometimes we need to hear ourselves, what matters to us.

But remember what Jesus said at the end of that parable. He says, when the Son of man returns, will he find faith? This is important. So I'm going to ask you, even if you've got just mustard seed stuff, believe that someone is listening. Believe that someone is listening.

Believing is a really, really big deal. In Mark, Jesus has this encounter with a father who has an epileptic son. And he's asking Jesus to heal his son. And Jesus says, well, all things are possible to him who believes. And the Father says this.

He goes, I believe, but help my. Anyone want to finish that? Help my unbelief. See, we live in these two worlds, don't we, where we believe. And yet it's hard sometimes.

Belief is important. And Jesus heals the boy. But what about when the boy isn't healed? I had a conversation recently with a good friend who was praying for a parent and God did not answer that prayer. And it really threw this person into a tailspin about their faith.

So what happens when we pray and God does not answer the way we want God to answer? We hope and pray God would answer. I'm going to give you a really, really profound answer to this. Are you ready? I don't know.

I don't know why God does not answer some very sincere, very unselfish, very good prayers. I don't know. But I do know that Jesus says time and time again, just keep praying. Just keep praying. Just keep praying, Keep praying.

You don't have to be George Clooney for your dad to take care of your needs, for your dad to want to hear what you have to say. You just need to be his kid. He's a good, good father. One of my favorite songs. We're going to sing it here in a little bit.

But if God is not your father, if you've never responded to the invitation he gives to become his child, today is the day to say yes to him. The Bible says if you declare with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, that God raised Jesus from the dead, then you will be saved. You'll become his child. So I'm going to encourage you. If you've never done that, today is the day you could do that, be baptized into his family, start living his life as a son or daughter of a good, good father.

And then begin living in this place of communication where you day in, day out talk about everything that matters to you because it matters to him. Heavenly Father, I thank you that we do not have to approach you with fear and trembling, but you invite us as redeemed children to come into your presence with joy and thanksgiving, with gladness, knowing that you will provide for us what we need. And time and time again, you prove that you will provide with us what we want. Sometimes you slow roll us. You make us wait a bit, I think for our own good and so that we can learn to delight in you first.

But no matter what we are praying about, what we are concerned about, I pray today your lesson to us from your word has been just keep praying, don't give up, because there's a reason in it. And I pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

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