

The Tenth Sunday of Pentecost

July 24, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** O Lord, your ears are always open to the prayers of your humble servants, who come to you in Jesus' name. Teach us always to ask according to your will that we may never fail to obtain the blessings you have promised; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia! (John 6:68)

**Sermon Text:** Genesis 18:20-32

How is your prayer life? Do you put the apostle Paul's words into action and *Pray continually*? ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)) (And yes, Paul means bring your requests to God every waking moment.) Do you pray with the absolute certainty that God will give what you need? ([James 1:6-7; 5:17-18](#)) Are you constantly knocking on God's door, as if forcing him out of bed to give you what you ask for? ([Luke 11:7-10](#))

Or would you describe prayer more like a "Hail Mary?" And no, I am not talking about praying to Mary, the mother of Jesus. I am talking about the last minute heave of desperation at the end of the football game because a team ran out of time and out of plays to win. Is prayer just a last-chance, desperate heave that God might possibly hear you because you ran out of options?

**Genesis 18:20-32**

<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

<sup>22</sup> The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

<sup>26</sup> The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

<sup>27</sup> Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, <sup>28</sup> what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?"

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

<sup>29</sup> Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

<sup>30</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"

He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

<sup>31</sup> Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"

He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

How is your prayer life? If you feel scared or uncertain or unsure of what to ask God, then look at Abraham's life. Learn from him the reason you have to **APPROACH YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER!** *with confidence, with boldness, and with persistence.*

I mean, do you notice that God always invites you to **APPROACH HIM IN PRAYER?** Nowhere in the Bible does God tell you not to pray. Just think about that for a minute. The Creator of the entire universe and the One who rules the entire universe wants you to pour out your heart to him! That means God never places limits on prayer. He does not label some of your requests "too-big-to-handle" or "too stupid" or "too meaningless." He is urging: *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened* ([Luke 11:9-10](#)). His ears are always open for you!

Have you ever wondered why? Why would God even offer to listen to you?

Abraham could very well have asked the same question. Why would God even listen to someone like him? It is not because Abraham is this "super-believer" who is a better Christian than everyone else. Quite frankly, Abraham is no different than you and me. He is a sinner who is standing before a God who hates sin. And yes, Abraham has a long list of sins. He fathered a child with someone not his wife ([Genesis 16:1-2](#)). He denied being married several times ([Genesis 12:10-20](#); [20:1-3](#)). His heart, like ours, worshipped objects that were not god. There is no reason for God to ever listen to Abraham! Abraham's *iniquities have separated [him] from [his] God; [his] sins have hidden [God's] face from [him], so that [God] will not hear* ([Isaiah 59:2](#)).

So, how can Abraham even speak to God? You see, Abraham trusts that God would send Jesus to pay the price owed for his sins. Through the eyes of faith Abraham sees his sins as already forgiven. He knows Jesus is coming. He knows that Jesus makes him able to **APPROACH HIS FATHER IN PRAYER.** So, Abraham does not approach in arrogance, but rather *with confidence.*

Jesus has opened that same communication between you and God! His death has washed away your sins. His resurrection from the dead declares you forgiven! He enters heaven as your Mediator— someone who brings your requests to God! That is why we end our Prayer of the Day with: *"...through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever."* Jesus has turned God's ears to you! You can **APPROACH YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER** *with confidence* because your identity is now "child of God."

As God's child, he wants to listen to you! God does not call you "stranger" or "customer" or "client." God does not groan when he hears you pray. No, if he calls you "son" and "daughter" then he wants to listen to his "son" and "daughter." He wants to hear you ask for anything and everything. So, **APPROACH YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER** *with confidence!*

Just like Abraham does. God had revealed a future event. **[T]he LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”**

Two of **[t]he men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD.** It is just the two of them, standing face-to-face. The LORD is available— and **Abraham approached him...** He literally walks to the LORD. Nothing holds him back; he approaches *with confidence*—and not just that, but also *with boldness*.

Did you catch the first words out of his mouth? **“[LORD, will] you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”**

Did you squirm a little? It sounds like Abraham is lecturing God about what is wrong and what is right. In reality, Abraham is being bold.

You see, Abraham knows exactly who he is talking to— the LORD (in all capitals). I know I repeat it often, but it is important to remember what that name means. The “LORD” in all capitals tells you that your God treats his Word like a contract or a handshake. He will not break it!

The LORD gave his Word to enforce his commandments. He swears to punish those who cry out against him. Sodom and Gomorrah rejected God’s constant calls to repentance. So, the LORD is coming down in judgment against Sodom. The same LORD also promises forgiveness to those who repent ([Exodus 34:6-7](#)).

Abraham knows this is how the LORD acts. So, he takes God’s Word, points to God’s love for believers, and confesses that God cannot treat nonbeliever and believer alike. Abraham **APPROACHES HIS FATHER IN PRAYER** *with boldness*.

You, being God’s child, are able to do the same thing. Think about what that means for you. As God’s child, you can **APPROACH YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER** *with boldness*. After all, that is how children behave, right? They ask every “why”-question under the sun. They are not ashamed to ask about sensitive issues. They ask you questions that no friend would ask. Children are bold askers!

As God’s child, be bold in prayer. Point to what God has promised you. Express your trust in his promises. God has promised to protect you. Remind God to protect you because he has already made that promise ([Psalm 91:11-12](#)). God has promised to remain with you always ([Matthew 28:20](#)). Plead with God to continue watching over you because he has promised that. God has promised to never forsake you ([Hebrews 13:5-6](#)). Express your trust that God will do just as he said.

That is how children behave, right? Little children tell their parents: “But you said...!” The parent remembers their promise and keeps it. God is not a forgetful parent. Instead, he gives you the opportunity to read his Word, grasp his promise, and tightly cling to what he has guaranteed. **APPROACH YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER** *with boldness and with persistence*.

You can certainly say that Abraham was persistent. He pleads with God over and over and over again to hear and answer him. Fifty people to forty-five people, forty-five to forty, forty to thirty, thirty to twenty, twenty to ten. A part of you wants to say: “Enough Abraham—we get it!” Yet, God does not say that. Instead, he welcomes such persistence. Six times Abraham pleads for the righteous to be spared. Six times God answers.

Abraham was concerned about the believers living in Sodom. He did not want them destroyed with the wicked. Worrying about the situation would fix it. He knew his Father in heaven is more than capable of answering him— and in calming his fears.

So, Abraham literally prays nonstop. He does what Jesus urges. He “keeps on asking.” He “continues seeking.” He is “always knocking.”

Nowhere has God placed limits on prayer. If God wanted you to approach him only for certain things at certain times, he would have told you— but he has not. He tells you that his ears are always open for you!

So, **APPROACH YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER** *with persistence!* If something weighs heavy on your mind, pray! If your health is constantly on your mind, bring your concerns to God. If the future seems bleak, carry your fears to God. If it feels like God is failing you, unload your feelings to God. He stands as a perfect Father, arms open, ears willing to listen!

Maybe it looks like God does not answer you—or that he does not give you what you ask for. If you keep on reading, you see Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed ([Genesis 19](#)). Abraham asked for the city to be saved. God said he would spare it for the sake of ten people. Yet, it is destroyed! How do these events reconcile with Abraham’s words?

God did answer Abraham. Ten righteous people were not found in the city! He saved three believers: Lot and Lot’s two daughters. God spared the righteous. He did not sweep them away with the wicked. He answered Abraham.

So, pray *with persistence*— because you can! God, your heavenly Father, gives you what we need, at the best of times. Earthly fathers know what to give their children. My daughter, Clara once asked to help change the oil in my car. I know she sincerely wanted to help, but I recognize the danger in letting a 4-year-old to lay under a 2,000 pound car with toxic oil dripping out of it. So, my “No”-answer was for her own good. Or sometimes she breaks a toy and asks for tape or glue to fix it. I respond by buying a replacement toy; it is something better than what she requested. I answer in ways I know are for her best interests.

When you pray, remember who you are in God’s sight. He is the Father; you are his child. He always listens; you persistently ask. He answers in ways to strengthen your faith, to increase your trust, to soothe your fears. After all, he is your heavenly Father.

You have this tremendous privilege of asking God anything. The God who controls the entire universe wants to hear from you! The God who watches over everything actually listens to you! Your Father answers you!

This is no last ditch, desperate Hail-Mary-heave to God. This is your Father’s promise to you. It is cemented in the fact that you are his child. You have his Word that he will keep his promises. As his child, you will never tire him out with your constant prayers. **APPROACH YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER!** *with confidence, with boldness, and with persistence.*