

Luke 11:1-13 ⁸...because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

Just about all of us have learned to live with automated answering services as a necessary part of modernization. Many even let their machines/voicemails pick up nearly all the time. But it could lead one to wonder, “What if God decided to install an automated answering service at his throne of grace? Such a thought led one author to write of it: ♦

Imagine praying and hearing this: “Thank you for calling ‘My Father’s House’. Please select one of the following four options: Press 1 for a request. Press 2 for a thanksgiving. Press 3 to complain. For all other inquiries, press 4.”

You press 1 and hear: We’re sorry. Due to heavier than expected volume, please try your call again later. Your business is important to us.” Or how about, “All of the angels are helping other customers right now. Please stay on the line. Your call will be answered in the order in which it was received.” Or even, “Our computers indicate that you have called once today already. Please hang up and try again tomorrow.”

Can you imagine receiving responses like these as you “call on God” in prayer? How irritating, to say the least! But I wonder how we would have felt if we were on the receiving end of say, Abraham’s prayer. Would we have been as patient as the Lord? You might defend Abraham and say that he was just being persistent. But, again, I wonder how we would have felt with Abraham’s “persistence.” Maybe we would be more likely described him as an *irritant* rather than *persistent*. Yet that is precisely the kind of boldness we are encouraged to have in prayer. ♦

Look at the example Jesus gives. A man unprepared for guests goes to his friend and neighbor in the middle of the night to borrow food for his guests. In spite of the friendship, the neighbor doesn’t want to get out of bed. Yet, *I tell you, though he will*

not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ⁹ *“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.* ¹⁰ *For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

The knock on the door in the middle of the night seems an extraordinary circumstance. Yet consider this story of the husband and wife that were awakened at 3 in the morning by pounding on their front door. *They could faintly hear a man’s cries for help. In the midst of a snowstorm the man was asking for a push. He must be stuck in the snow if he needs a push. But the husband was hesitant. After all, it was cold outside and he was warm in his bed. The lights were out in the house, so it wasn’t like the man outside knew for sure anyone was home. Besides, he sounded like he had been drinking and probably deserved what had happened to him in the first place. No, he wasn’t going to go and help.*

His good wife, however, reminded him that he himself had received help many times in his life. Here was a man in need and an opportunity to help. Slowly and reluctantly, the husband gave in to the reality of his own life and the persistent pleas from the man at the door. Bundling up, the husband called out that he was on his way. Stepping out the front door into the snowy cold, the husband couldn’t see the man at first. He said, “You said you need a push. Where are you stuck?” A voice from the right playfully said, ♦ “I’m over here on the porch swing...”

The extraordinary truth in all of this is that we are no more deserving of receiving help than the man on the swing. When we were born, our direct access to God was blocked by the stout door called sin. The prophet Isaiah ♦ says, *“...your iniquities (sins) have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear”* (Is. 59:2).

Yet, here we are today ♦ and every day, allowed, invited and encouraged even,

to approach the door and call for help, to **ask...seek...knock** for anything that we need, anything that we want, anything that weighs on our hearts; all the while knowing that the Father will have good things in store for us. After all, **"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

And hasn't he given us the greatest gift of all already? Lost in our condemning, separating sinfulness, we didn't know what we *needed* to even *ask* for it! Yet he graciously gave us the priceless gift of his own Son, as our Savior from the very sin that separated us from our dear Father in the first place. ♦ ♦ **"Now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."** (Ephesians 2:13) ♦ **We have confidence...by the blood of Jesus** (Hebrews 10:19) to ♦ **approach the throne of grace ... - as Abraham, as dear children - so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.** (Hebrews 4:16) Yes, we are invited to approach and, get this: it actually matters!

♦ The Third Petition of the Prayer our Savior has taught us reads: **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** It has been said that this petition is the central petition of the Lord's Prayer. So well understood is it that Luke doesn't even record the petition in his account. Luther explains the petition this way: ♦ *God's good and gracious will is certainly done with or without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.* But since God's will is always done, what's the point of praying for it, right?

Understand the will of the Lord. The moving cause of the Lord's will is two-fold: 1) internal causes like his love and compassion; and 2) external causes like human need and actions. That means that the Lord, when he hears our prayers, will both act in his grace for our benefit and he will

consider our actions, attitudes, and requests as he acts in the way that is best.

Think, then, of the confidence, the boldness we can have as we approach our dear Father! Our prayers are not so many pennies disappearing and disappointing into the depths of a wishing well. We need not fear an automated answering service that may or may not get us through to the provider of **every good and perfect gift.** No, our prayerful petitions are born, by the Spirit himself, to the very heart of our heavenly Father, who longs to hear them.

But what if I don't get what I'm asking for? I can remember as a kid being told that God answers prayer in three ways: 1) Yes; 2) No; and 3) Not yet. In my years of Christian life and pastoral ministry since then, I have come to believe that, while those three answers do indeed happen, it really isn't accurate to say that God ever really says "No" to our prayers. And isn't that what often keeps us from asking for anything in life? Most of us would rather not ask than hear that disappointing word "No."

♦ But listen to how Paul encourages us and the Ephesians. He calls on us to pray ♦ **to him who is able to do more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.** (Eph. 3:20) You see, even if our dear Father doesn't give us exactly what we're praying for, he isn't saying "No." He's actually giving us something better, something **more than all we ask or imagine** and not according to our limited power and understanding, but **according to his power that is at work within us.**

♦ So pray my dear friends, with all boldness and confidence and certainty. ♦ **For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.** Amen.