

GOD, ARE YOU SLEEPING?

Luke 11:5–13

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We're continuing our study together in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is teaching on prayer.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 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. 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. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion [I know a few kids who would do that!]? 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!" (Luke 11:5–13, NIV).

There have been four times in my life where I have specifically sought a major request from God and have not received it. In addition, there have been many other times when I have brought to the Lord specific needs which I felt were legitimate requests for the Lord to answer in a particular way, or when I was praying for others—and the requests were not answered. Perhaps you have had similar things happen to you. If such, maybe you are—with me—for the title of this message today, "God, Are You Sleeping?" "I'm here, Lord. I've asked. I have sought. I have knocked. Where is Your answer?"

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How can we cope with those times in our life when God appears to be sleeping? How can we cope when we feel we've done exactly what the Scriptures tell us to do and yet we have not gotten the answer we have sought?

In trying to answer that question, "God, are You sleeping?" I want to raise three questions that will form my outline today from this text. We ask God the question "Are You sleeping?" I think He responds to us by giving us three questions to ask ourselves.

I. Am I praying in the pattern that Jesus gave?

Prayer is not God's invitation to us for a blank check, or to simply fill out an order list, a grocery store list, to ask anything that we particularly want. Prayer is conditioned by asking "in His name." And it is prayer that is formed out of the pattern which He gives. This teaching on asking and seeking and knocking follows four verses, at the beginning of Luke 11, in which the Lord has given us a definite pattern for our praying, a pattern which primarily consists of seeking God's concerns that His name be hallowed and that His kingdom come. And then, praying for concerns of ours that God seeks to meet: our daily necessities, forgiveness of sin and direction in our life. And praying for needs to flow out of that kind of basic pattern in life. The emphasis, in fact, on prayer is in the teaching of Jesus and the personal example of Jesus and in the example of the apostles, as contained both in Acts and in the epistles.

The pattern of prayer is that our prayer should seek to ask God to change us rather than simply asking God first to change our circumstances. I've found that a great deal of my praying focuses on asking God to change the externals of my life, the things that are outside me that would make life more pleasing or better for me or someone else. God's primary purpose in my praying is that, first of all, my will might be brought into alignment with His, and that my spirit and the tenor of my life might pick up on the spirit and the tenor of Jesus' life. Thus, if you follow the Lord's

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example in praying in His own personal prayer life, you see that He does not ask, for example, for things for Himself, to simply fulfill his own physical desires, but He asks that He might be responsive to God's will for Him and that He might pick up the cross as an act of service to God and to others.

I was talking with Jerry, our minister of music, about this message, as it was building through the week and saying that I wanted to draw a distinction between asking God to change our externals versus asking God to change us inside. He related this story from his early days in business, when he owned a music store. He said, "I used to pray, O Lord, send in the customers." And when the customers didn't materialize, Jerry said, "I went to a minister friend, an older friend, and asked him what was wrong with my praying. Why wasn't God sending in the customers? He told me to pray like this: 'Lord, help me to make the right decisions which will draw the customers in.'"

That really brings a change in our praying, where we become part of the answer to the prayer. And the changes that we seek externally are accomplished as a result of God's working internally in us.

My mentor and the person who's had great influence on my life, Dr. J. Robert Ashcroft, said on one occasion, "You are part of God's answer to your prayer." That is a vital dimension in following the pattern of prayers. "Lord, how do You want me to be involved?" Am I simply asking for externals?

One of our members shared with me this letter they received in the mail from a "ministry." I won't name the ministry or the member. But the letter came with this tin gold watch. It's actually a tin watch, but it's painted yellow, which is gold. The hand is set at seven to twelve. What you're supposed to do is lay this watch—the evening that you get it—on James 5:16 which talks

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about asking. Lay it there, and in the morning, take it out and at seven to twelve—why seven to twelve? Because God created the world in seven days and there are twelve apostles and twelve gates to the holy city. Those are both divine numbers. So at seven to twelve, you're to pray and you're to take this and wrap your gold tithe offering book around it, and send it to the ministry. If you do this, God's going to give you everything. In fact, it says, "While the first strains of dawn's early morning light starts breaking and driving away the darkness of night over Santa Ana, while you lay sleeping at..." and the computer punches in the street address, "...may it be the power of God driving away hurts, sickness, poverty from the [blank] street. Brother, talk to me on these lines below about what you want God to do for you."

If we get a letter like that, we all laugh. I look at this and think, "I wonder what kind of 'ministry' this guy's involved in." I think he's not even a believer. I suspect he's come across a good way to get a living without having to work for it. Can you imagine Jesus sending out a letter like this? Maybe I'm a little hard on the guy but... this magical gold watch. Do this gimmick and get everything! Place this miracle prayer time watch on the Bible, leave it there tonight and then return it to the reverend, the man of God, and all you want will come to pass! It would be nice if prayer could be that simple, wouldn't it? Put the order in, punch the right buttons, send the right offerings, and on it clicks.

The key in that letter talked to me about what you want God to do for you. Maybe God's fundamental concern is that we first begin asking what God wants to do in us. In all eternity, God's going to be *doing* for us. Maybe now is our opportunity to do for God. Maybe God's concern, first of all, is that He might work in us according to His good will and pleasure. Praying in the pattern that Jesus gave us is to, first of all, focus upon that which is the Lord's concern and then move past that into, "Lord, what changes do You want to make in me?"

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You're saying, "Pastor, are you telling me not to pray for externals and that God doesn't change circumstances?" By no means. God does change circumstances and externalities. We must not divorce what God does there from His purposes and His kingdom and from what He wants to do in terms of changing our own lives personally. So when I bring my request to the Lord, I first ask, "Am I praying in the pattern that Jesus gave?"

II. Am I praying with the persistence that Jesus wants?

What Jesus does in this story is tell what, in His day, would be a funny, humorous story. He's talking about life in a small village where there are no inns to keep an overnight traveler. In most small villages, the peasants lived in a one-room house. The one room house in Palestinian days was divided. In fact, if you're in Israel today and go past Palestinian encampments, you can see all kinds of abandoned one-room houses. But the one-room house had two areas in it. One, a raised area which was where the family ate and slept all together. Then, the lower area of the room was where, at night, the animals would be brought in—the chickens and the pigs and the dogs and maybe even the family had a cow. It was brought in there.

You say, "That's awful." No, that's not awful. We live in these protected homes and condominiums and apartments and everybody sleeps in a different room. Maybe we grew apart from one another. If you were to ask me, "What do you remember as the happiest thing out of your childhood" I'd probably say, "In China, when we used to sleep in the kind of Chinese Holiday Inn." Only, everybody had their nook in the place and the nook was actually a bed made out of bud and straw, the same composition as the stuff in the walls. The "bed"—which was not a Sealy posturepedic mattress—was kind of old, hard, mud with straw in it. You lay a sleeping pad over it, and it was hollow underneath and heated with dried manure from the outside. I can remember, as a kid, just loving to curl up in that bed, the sense of security. The whole family was

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there and it was warm. Kids don't remember smells. The place wasn't smelly to me. It was warm and comfortable.

That's the kind of situation Jesus was talking about here, a nice, warm, comfortable place. In the lower part of the house are the chickens and dogs and pigs and maybe even a cow.

Then, in the middle of the night, some jerk comes knocking on the door! The door nearest to the pigs, cows, chickens, dogs. This friend has what the Jews would call hutzpah! Jesus says the reason why the sleeping friend got up to help the guy was not because he was his friend. He got up because of his persistence. The Greek word is difficult to translate into English, but it simply means that he got up because of his shamelessness. The man was totally shameless, standing there at the door, knocking, knowing that he would wake up and get the dog barking, the chicken cackling, the pig oinking and the cow mooing. And the kids wake up crying. He was shameless. If he'd had better sense, he would've prepared extra bread anyway. The interesting thing about this guy is that he wasn't embarrassed, or he wouldn't have woken up the whole household. That shows the importance of the Near Eastern hospitality. That was the greatest thing, to be embarrassed.

Jesus tells this story, not because He's saying God is like the friend who was sleeping and He's not going to answer you, but because you're His friend. You have to bang on the door to get him up. But Jesus gives this story as a contrast. If you being evil—that is, of the nature of Adam, of fallen humanity—know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more would God do for his children. That's the idea. God is unlike the man who has to be aroused, because He's willing and ready to give. But at the same time, God seeks those who will be persistent and go on asking, go on seeking, go on knocking. Be persistent in your prayer.

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I think the real question in the text is what is it that we're supposed to be asking? What are we supposed to be seeking? What are we to be knocking for?

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus told us what to seek, what to ask for, what to knock for. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done...give us this day our daily bread... Forgive us our sins...Lead us..."

There are times when we've come and knocked on the Lord's door and asked for something very specific. This Scripture rises and makes us think maybe we haven't done something right, or God is sleeping.

Yesterday afternoon, I was at St. Joseph's Hospital with a family of our church which is going through a very difficult time with the head of the household. He's a dear brother in Christ with six children, all grown and adult. He has cancer and he's now slipping in and out of a coma. His dear wife said to me before we prayed, "We've prayed and God hasn't answered our prayers." I understand that. I've been in that situation. A number of times with other people and with my own life. What's happening when we're asking and seeking and knocking and seemingly do not have the answer?

The problems we have in prayer obviously come when we're asking God to change our circumstances. Let me cite some areas where we've had answers to prayer and maybe where we've felt we haven't had answers. One is healing. If you are sick, follow the Scripture guidelines. Ask the elders to anoint you with oil and pray for you and make prayers repeatedly. It's ok to pray more than one time. Paul had a thorn in his flesh, which I understand to be a physical illness. He sought the Lord on three specific occasions in his life that the Lord would heal him. But the Lord chose to say to him instead, "My grace is sufficient for you."

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I believe in healing. In this audience today would you, by a show of hands, indicate if you are a person who at least once in your life God has miraculously healed, without using medicine, without doctors' care. But He has directly healed you in answer to prayer. How many have had an experience of healing like that?

I couldn't raise my hand. To my knowledge God has never directly healed me. I'm sure He's kept me from a lot of things, but I've never been healed. As a kid, I prayed to be healed of wearing glasses. Instead, the Lord healed my sister of bad eyesight. I tell her she needed it more than me and that's why. A few years ago, I don't know why, God didn't heal me when they prayed for me because I had a bad appendix and it had to come out. A few months ago, I had a gall bladder out. I have a very poor record of answered prayer in respect to healing.

That leads me to ask the second question. How many of you know someone that God has definitely healed? There's no explanation except God did heal them. I can raise my hand on that. Why doesn't God just heal everybody? I wish I could tell you that He heals everybody except those who have sin in their life and don't have faith. But it's not that simple. Because I know people who aren't healed that have faith and don't have sin. If God doesn't save us on our merit, He doesn't heal us on our merit either. It's by grace.

I have found, however, that those who God has not healed, He's given the grace to deal with it. In fact, Jesus does an unusual twist to this story. He says ask, "Seek, knock," and just as we're getting ready to write the check out for anything that we want, He puts an O. Henry twist on it. He says, "How much more will God give the Spirit to those who ask Him?" In other words, the answer to the prayer is that God is going to give Himself as an answer to the problem. How much more will God give you His Spirit.

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So I've found that people who haven't been healed have been given the Spirit of God to cope with what's going on in their life. I have found, by the way, real sick people physically who have a healthy spirit. I would rather, if it were a choice, have a healthy spirit with a sick body than a well body with a sick spirit. Sure, Jesus gives us the opportunity to ask that He would change our circumstances. But He promises us the promise that is unconditional, that whatever we ask, seek or knock, He will give to us the Spirit. He does not say *carte blanche*. He will always give us the healing.

Maybe work for you is the area you've been praying, "God, change my circumstances," and the door of employment has not yet opened. I was thinking of the Scriptures, of a person who was an unemployed apostle by the name of Paul. Where was Paul ever unemployed? Acts 16 tells us that, in the beginning of the second missionary journey, he had set out and revisited the churches he had founded on the first journey, which are now eastern southern Turkey. When he had finished visiting them, he thought he was going to go to Asia, which is western Turkey today, and the Lord said, "No." And then he went north, to northern Turkey or lower Russia, Bithynia and the Holy Spirit said, "No, you can't go there." He winds up from Troy, crossing the ocean to a town of Philippi, on the basis of a vision, and winds up—after several weeks—in Philippi; he still doesn't have any work. He's spent months, as an apostle, trying to figure out where God is going to open a door. He's gone hundreds of miles. Nothing is open. For all practical purposes, he's unemployed. Then, after casting a demon out of a girl at Philippi, he winds up hauled in before the authorities, thoroughly beaten and thrown into prison. The great thing about Paul, in the midst of his unemployment, is he doesn't measure God by his experience. So many times that's the case. We have an experience, and maybe we're on the downside. All of us know what it's like to go through downsides. When we're on the downside, we tend to think of God as being

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a downer too. And maybe God's down on us. Maybe God is sleeping. We measure, we project onto God the emotional problem that we are going through.

Paul could have said, "Here I've given the best years of my life to serve God and look at what He's done to me. He left me as an unemployed apostle." He does a very marvelous thing in that Philippi jail, as a model of prayer. At that moment, he's not asking God to change the circumstances. He's not even really complaining to God, which is kind of surprising to me because, if I'd been in his shoes, I'd be complaining like crazy. I'd say, "God, if I get out of this jail, You see if I ever serve You again! I'll go home and be a good church member, pay my tithes, show up on Sunday morning and that's all I'm going to do. I'll keep that relationship because I don't want to go to hell. But don't ask me for any more than that, if this is how You're going to treat me."

What's he doing at midnight? He's probably awake because he's hurting, that's why he's singing. At midnight he's giving praises to God. What's he doing? He's saying there are objective realities about God, things that are true, whether or not they are at this present moment. Because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has guaranteed to us all things. His goodness and His essential goodness of nature are forever established. Therefore, rather than bringing God into line with my feelings, I will bring my feelings into line with who God is and I will praise God, even in the tough times. What he finds is that God is doing a work in him and then, when God's particular purpose in that moment is completed, God opens doors for him. There are prayers we pray for others to change. "Lord, if you'd just change so-and-so..." and maybe the Lord isn't going to change them because He's not going to tamper with their own free will, no matter how much we pray. So we have to back off and say, "Lord, what do You want to change about me. I'd love for the other person to change, but maybe You want me, and my

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relationship to them and my attitude toward them to change.” So I must go on asking and seeking and knocking.

Someone has said that asking is the request phase and seeing is the perfecting time. When we’re through asking, there comes a moment when we’ll collect and begin to perfect the request, and knocking is the implementation. We begin to get a desire and design as to which God is perfecting as we ask. The Lord calls us to remain persistent in prayer.

The story is told of a fellow who was reared in the city. He moved out to the farm and bought him some cows. One day, while he was in the feed store, he complained to the owner in the feed store that his best cow had gone dry. The feed store owner said, “Have you been feeding the cow what I’ve been selling you?” “Yes, I’ve been feeding right proportion, but she’s gone dry. I’ve been feeding her what you’ve been selling me,” said the man. Then the owner said, “Are you milking her everyday?” to which he replied, “Just about every day. When I need six or eight ounces of milk for breakfast, I go out and get it. If I don’t need any, I don’t get it. I just let her save it up.” The feed owner had to explain to the new farmer that that’s not how cows function. Asking for God’s presence in our life is not good if we just come to Him once in a while when we need a six-ounce dose. It’s that continual relationship that the Lord is asking for. Asking, seeking, knocking. It’s when we quit asking in prayer that we really get into spiritual trouble. When things go wrong in our life it seems like everything goes—finances go, relationships often go, spirituality often goes. Sometimes they go in that order—finances, relationships, spirituality. Sometimes, it’s the opposite. They can go randomly. But one of the things that happens in relationships—especially in families and marriages when things begin to get sticky—is we quit praying for one another, praying for God to work out His purposes in our home and in our life. Obviously, when we quit praying, we block the key means the Lord can use to bring healing in

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the relationship. So the Lord is saying to us in our prayer life, “Don’t let there be a time when you just remove prayer from your life and you quit praying about a person or quit praying about a need or quit praying for a relationship.” Asking and seeking and knocking are meant to be a forever part of life.

In fact, I’ve realized that there will never be a time in my life or your life when we won’t need to pray. Just like there’s never a time in my life when I don’t need to read. I was with my son in my office this week and we were looking at my books. He said, “Dad, have you read all those books?” I have to admit, “No, I haven’t read all those books.” I was smart enough when I was at seminary to realize if I bought used books cheap, that when you someday pastor a church, people will walk into your office and think you were educated. It’s cheaper than wallpaper, if you get a lot of books up on the shelves. I haven’t read all the books. They’re there for adornment. Some of them I’ve read. Many of them I’ve read parts of.

But I realize that I cannot say at this point in my life, “I’ve read my last book. I’m smart now. I know everything I need to know and I can coast the rest of my life.” If I quit reading, twelve months from now you’ll be able to tell it. Because we’re all feeders. I need to feed, you need to feed. We feed on ideas. We feed on words. So I need to go on reading because there will never be a point in my life when I can simply say, “I don’t need to learn anymore, I don’t need to read anymore.” There isn’t any time in our life we can say, “We’re all prayed up. We don’t need to pray anymore.” Jesus says, “Go on asking, go on seeking, go on knockings and the door will be opened to you and I’ll give you the Spirit.” That’s His promise. That’s how He’ll answer the prayer—give the Spirit. Sometimes, what we’re seeking and asking for, we have a particular way in mind that the Lord’s going to deliver on what we’re going to ask for and He may, instead, give us the Spirit. Which, instead of answering the request the specific way we had desired, instead,

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he gives us the mind of God in that situation and the power and presence and endurance of Christ to go through it.

Stephen, I'm sure, was asking the Lord, as they were getting ready to pelt him with rocks, "Get me out of this, Lord." But the Lord gave him the Spirit, who gave him the ability to say, "Forgive them. Hold not this sin to their account."

Am I praying in the pattern Jesus gave me? Am I praying with persistence?

III. Am I committed to the goodness of God?

"If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children..." Jesus says that God will not give us what is useless. He will not give you a stone in the place of a fish. He will, when He answers your prayer, not give you what is dangerous. He will not give you a scorpion for an egg. He will, instead, give the Spirit to those who ask.

I look back on the four major no's of my life, which I shared in the introduction of this message today, four times when God said no to me. The first time He said no to me, I was so upset with God I would hardly talk to Him for a couple of years. I kept going to seminary because I thought that someday I might change my mind. But I was really upset with God. I found, in each of those occasions, God did give me the Holy Spirit so that my life would have the response that He wanted and that my direction in life would prove satisfying to me. It simply meant that I must not judge God by that particular moment in my life. So often, when we're going through some low times, down time in our life, therefore, our interpretation of all of life is filtered through the microscope of that moment and, rather than backing up and seeing the full side of life, we judge Him by that particular slice, that particular moment, rather than the whole. The Scriptures tell us, time and time again, that God is a good God who gives good gifts to His children and He always answers prayer and the answers He gives to prayer may not always be what I wanted, but they

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will always be good for me; and all the promises of God, as Paul said, are yes and so be it in Christ. I see that God has a satisfying direction for my life and that the requests of children must always be filtered past the goodness of the father, so the requests of my life are always filtered past the goodness of God.

I debated whether to use this little story to illustrate faith. That God sometimes does strange things and we look and we don't understand what God is doing when He's actually preserving us from something that could be very bad. Let me tell this apocryphal story. The theology in part of it is really bad. But the point that it illustrates, the bottom line, is really good. It's a purely apocryphal story. It's of a rabbi traveling on a journey with the prophet Elijah. They had traveled all day, and at nightfall, they come to a little humble cottage of a poor man whose only treasure in life was a cow. In an agrarian society, a cow is like having a Cadillac in the garage. It's kind of where wealth is at for the poor man. The poor man runs out of his cottage with his wife. They welcome the prophet and the rabbi and offer them simple hospitality in their rather poor circumstances of life. They take milk from their cow and provide the rabbi and Elijah with plenty of milk and butter and bread. Then they let them have their own bed for the evening, while they go sleep on the floor. In the morning, when they all wake up, the poor man's cow was dead. The prophet Elijah and the rabbi walked all day the next day and that evening came to the house of a very wealthy merchant, whose hospitality they looked forward to because he had so much to offer. But instead of being hospitable to them, he was cold and proud and he had them stay in the cowshed for the evening, and only gave them bread and water to eat. When morning had come, Elijah got up and thanked the man for what he had done and sent a mason to repair one of the rich man's walls, which was falling down. He did this as his way of saying thanks. The rabbi traveling with Elijah was very upset with Elijah and said, "I do not understand what you were

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doing. When we went to the poor man's house, he treated us graciously and in the morning we got up and his cow was dead. We go to the rich man's house and he treats us terribly. When we get up in the morning you send somebody to repair his walls. I don't understand." Elijah is said to have replied, "In regard to the poor man who treated us so hospitably, it was decreed that his wife was to die that night, but as a reward for his goodness, God took the cow instead. And in respect to the rich miser, I repaired the wall because a chest of gold was concealed near the place where it was broken down, and if the miser had repaired the wall himself, he could have discovered the treasure." Say not therefore to the Lord, "What doest Thou?" but say in your heart, "Must not the Lord of all the earth be right?"

I'm not sure about the theological soundness of taking the cow instead of the wife. I'm not sure that's how it works. That theology is bad. I am sure about the theology that says to us that God many times gives us something that we did not ask for that is for our good and keeps us from something that would have been for our harm, and spares us from things we know not of what we've even been spared.

The Father is good. We must measure the goodness of God by the length of time and eternity, not by this particular moment and the jam we're in. For, from all eternity, God has loved us. God gave His Son to die for us. God granted us salvation. In God, we have an inheritance. We are adopted as sons and as daughters. Christ is preparing a place for us. We have eternal life. There will be a day when we stand in the presence of God and all of life shall be looked at and the bottom line will be, "God is good." Therefore, we must never measure God by what is happening in the top of the fifth inning when we're behind twelve to nothing and seeming like we're never going to dig out of the hole. We measure God by the fact that the game of life is not over until we stand in His presence. And when we stand in His presence, all His goodness will be

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established. And living in light of eternity, we therefore have hope. That's the difference between us and the world. The world does not know this and that's why, when the world goes through tragedy and sorrow, it's like a ton of bricks because there's nothing beyond that. But in Christ, there is hope, because we have the goodness of God who loves us and died for us and keeps us and preserves us until an hour when we stand before Him. We, therefore, take all of our requests, knowing that we're coming to a good God who we give the freedom to say yes or no, or wait.

I'm going to take one more second. God uses people who are on extremes. I try to be as balanced as I can, but I realize, sometimes, that God uses people who are unbalanced. So I'm going to get a little unbalanced for a moment, and you can be like the Bereans and search God's Word. But I think the unbalance is this: That we, as God's people, need to give Him freedom into how He chooses to answer our prayer. And not always come to God as if we know what God is supposed to do and say to Him, "God, You've got to do this or else!" There are times, even when we need to come and quit misquoting God's Word to Him. We're great at doing that. We come to God and say, "Here and here and here...we just throw this at You, God." Many times we do that; we haven't really understood what God has said in His Word.

There are times in our life when we just need to come to the Lord and say, "Lord, You know what my heart wants. You know what I feel I need, but I receive whatever answer You will give with gratitude in my heart, knowing You are a loving and good heavenly Father, You, the God of all the earth, will do right." I think that's a part of faith as well. There are two dimensions of faith. Faith that asks and believes God in special circumstances, that He's going to work. That kind of faith is special and a gift from God. Then there's a kind of faith that simply trusts and says, "God, My life is in Your hands. Whatever You do is fine with me. Help me to be pure.

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Help me to keep serving You. Help me to keep loving You with all my heart. But I give this to You. Your answer will satisfy my heart, Lord.” We need that kind of praying as well in the body of Christ.

Closing Prayer

As your head is bowed, I really feel directed to say something to two different groups in here.

One, to a person who has quit praying for something. Maybe you’ve quit praying for your wife or your husband or your family or your children or your parents. The reason you’ve quit praying is that they just seem hopeless. The Lord is saying to you, “It was never My intention that you stop praying for them. Some things aren’t made in a day. Some relationships aren’t made in a moment of time. They take a lifetime—fifteen, twenty, thirty years. Don’t ever give up praying because prayer is the cement that I’ll use to draw you together.” I’d just like to encourage you, if you’ve quit praying, to make an affirmation in your heart, as I lead you in prayer in just a moment, to begin praying again for the person or persons you’ve quit praying for.

Then secondly, I’d like to talk to those of you who’ve been praying for specific things—healing, employment, changes in other people. To date, God has not given you what you’ve asked and you’re discouraged. I encourage you to go on praying. Could I encourage you, as well, to direct a little bit different focus to your prayer and to say to the Lord, “Lord, what kind of a person do You really want me to be in this time, while I’m in need? What kind of a person do You want me to be like? How do You want me to respond to this? What traits in my character and my life are You seeking to develop?” Would you ask the Lord that you could extract out of this moment of difficulty all the honey and the sweetness that’s in this, all the water of refreshing that’s there, that you can possibly get. Let the goodness of the Lord minister to you while waiting for a final

GOD, ARE YOU SLEEPING?

Luke 11:5–13

crystallization of some of the things you've prayed for. God, what changes in this time of difficulty do You want to work in me?

If you're in neither of those conditions, would you join your heart in a prayer of faith with me?

Lord Jesus, help me to begin praying again for...*and fill in the name. Pray this in your own*

heart. Help me to begin praying for...Forgive me, Lord, for not praying. Forgive me, Lord, for

the attitudes which I have developed towards that other person because I have not been praying.

Help me, Lord, to pray for them and to pray for the healing that needs to take place between me

and them. Then, Lord, I join in prayer for all those who are struggling and asking You for

specific things. Give us Your Spirit, Lord. Above all things, help us to have Your attitudes, Your

likeness, Your gentleness. For we realize that when You give us the Spirit, what You do is put a

great love in our life and peace and joy and patience and goodness and gentleness and

faithfulness and self-control. These aren't just qualities limited to good times, but these are

qualities for bad times, which are qualities we have when Your Spirit dwells in us, the Spirit of

love and joy and peace and patience and goodness and gentleness and faith. We need to trust

You, Lord. And self-control...we ask and we seek and we knock for that in our lives as well.

Bless Your people, Lord. We know You're not sleeping. You who watch over Your people never

sleep nor slumber. Your answers are always good for us. Thank You for all the things You have

given us. We praise Your name. Amen.