

*Genesis 18:20-25 So the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very flagrant, <sup>21</sup>I will go down now and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has come to me. If not, I will know.”*

*<sup>22</sup>The two men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup>Abraham approached him and said, “Will you really sweep away the righteous along with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep them away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup>You would never do such a thing, killing the righteous along with the wicked, treating the righteous the same as the wicked. You would never do such a thing. The Judge of all the earth should do right, shouldn’t he?”*

These words continue the thought of chapter 18. Earlier in the chapter we hear how the Lord came down to earth with two of his angels and visited Abraham and Sarah. He did this because in his grace he wanted to reassure Abraham and Sarah that he would indeed keep his promise to give them a son. Once the visit was finished, God and his two angels got up and started to make their way to the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. That is where our lesson picks up.

That backdrop is important. For in these words we see Abraham pray. In fact, we see him pray very boldly and very persistently. So much so that we might find ourselves asking: “How could he be so bold? How could he ask so much? Why was he so confident to keep pressing the Lord the way he did?”

Well, it is because of the grace that God had just showered upon him. God went so far as to visit him in person to reassure him that his promises are true. God had made it clear he wanted to share Abraham’s company as a friend. That’s why Abraham’s prayer could know no limits.

1. Why is the background to these words important to know?

2. Consider the two passages below. How did Jesus demonstrate prayer’s importance?

*Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

*Luke 6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*

***Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the righteousness that you have provided through your Son. Help me meditate daily on the value of this priceless gift, and lead me to treasure the assurance that you offer through it. Amen.***

*Genesis 18:20-25 So the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very flagrant, <sup>21</sup>I will go down now and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has come to me. If not, I will know.”*

These words are pretty straightforward. Something was going on in Sodom and Gomorrah that prompted God to go and investigate. Of course, God didn't actually need to go down to these cities to check out what was going on. He knows all things. He's present everywhere. He knew what the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were up to. But by telling Abraham that he was going to investigate we are reminded that God does not act without first having gathered all the information. His judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah was not going to be arbitrary. There would be no miscarriage of justice. He knew the facts and he would act accordingly.

And what was it that was going on there? The answer is sin. We know from the rest of Scripture that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were guilty of the sin of homosexuality. But it wasn't so much the specific kind of sin that was so disturbing. After all, every sin is disturbing and an offense to God. Rather, it was their attitude toward sin. They didn't care that they were doing wrong. Their destruction came not because this sin was unforgivable, but because they were impenitent. Their unbelief was evident in their rejection of God's law and their willful perversion of God's plan for marriage.

1. What is God emphasizing by saying that he “will go down now and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has come to me”? Doesn't God know everything?
  
2. How do we know that a homosexual lifestyle is not just an “alternate” lifestyle?
  
3. If someone came to church one Sunday who we knew was actively living a homosexual lifestyle, should we welcome them in?

***Prayer: Through law and gospel, Lord, lead us to repentance and peace. Guide us as you did Abraham, and sustain our faith by your promises. Amen.***

*Genesis 18:22-25 The two men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup>Abraham approached him and said, “Will you really sweep away the righteous along with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep them away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup>You would never do such a thing, killing the righteous along with the wicked, treating the righteous the same as the wicked. You would never do such a thing. The Judge of all the earth should do right, shouldn’t he?”*

God told Abraham he was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Notice Abraham’s reaction. We might have expected Abraham to say, “Well, it’s about time, Lord! Finally those people are going to get what they deserve! Good riddance!”

After all, that’s the way we feel sometimes, isn’t it? When someone makes our life difficult we want to see them receive God’s vengeance. When people recklessly take the lives of others we want God to give them what they deserve. But that’s not what Abraham did. Instead Abraham thought about God’s grace.

First, he thought about the grace God had shown to him. You see, Abraham knew that same sinful heart that beat in the people of Sodom and Gomorrah beat in his own chest. He recognized that it was only by God’s grace and patience that he had not been destroyed for the many times he had failed to obey God and trust his promises. Mustn’t we say the same thing?

Too often we fail to take our sin seriously. Rather than taking to heart what God’s Word says, we rationalize things in our own minds. “It could be worse. It’s not as bad as what others do. At least I’ve never done that.” Then follows a failure to take God and his holiness seriously. “He can’t be that upset. God knows I can’t be perfect. He won’t punish me for that.” So yes, the same sinful heart that beat in the people of Sodom and Gomorrah beats in our own chest. We deserve the same fate.

1. What should keep us from having this attitude toward others: “Finally those people are going to get what they deserve! Good riddance!”
2. Who are the righteous for whom Abraham intercedes?
3. In what ways do we fail to take our sin and God’s holiness seriously?

*Prayer: Amazing grace – how sweet the sound – that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see. Amen.*

It's only when we take our sin seriously and God seriously that grace truly can become grace. Then we truly realize how undeserving we are to have God love us. Then we understand how amazing it is that Jesus would willingly become our substitute. Then we grasp how incredible it is that Jesus would pick up our sin and suffer their penalty in our place. Then we begin to appreciate how marvelous it is to hear that we are forgiven in Christ. Then, and only then, do we truly recognize just how much God loves us, and just how serious he is about his invitation for us to pray to him.

It's that grace that made Abraham bold and persistent in his prayers, and it is that grace that makes us confident to be bold and persistent as well. Abraham didn't say to himself, "It won't matter if I pray. It won't matter what I say. Who am I to pray anyway? God will do whatever he wants to do." No, Abraham's prayer is just the opposite of that.

1. Explain/discuss: "It's only when we take our sin seriously and God seriously that grace truly can become grace."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is it that enables us to be bold and persistent in our prayers?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why do our prayers delight God?

***Prayer: Our sins are without number, O Lord, but your grace is without measure. Thank you for showing us the peace that is ours because of the forgiveness you have given through Christ. In the peace of forgiveness we praise you, and we pray to you, O Lord. Amen.***

<sup>26</sup>The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people within the city of Sodom, then I will spare the entire place for their sake.” <sup>27</sup>Abraham answered, “See now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it on myself to speak to my Lord. <sup>28</sup>What if there are five fewer than fifty righteous? Will you destroy the entire city if the number is five short?” He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” <sup>29</sup>He spoke to him yet again and said, “What if only forty are found there?” He said, “I will not do it for the sake of the forty.” <sup>30</sup>He said, “Please, do not be angry, my Lord, but I will speak again. What if thirty are found there?...What if ten are found there?” He said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten.”

When you hear this lesson, don't you have to ask, "Why don't I pray to God this way?" Often times this is not the way we pray, is it? Often times we do not have the boldness and confidence of Abraham. Too often we have a "why-bother" approach to prayer, wouldn't you agree? I have some family members that are sick and struggling. Some of them don't believe and are going to hell. I know I should pray for them, but really, why bother? It's not going to make much of a difference anyway? God's just going to do whatever he does, whether I pray or not."

Does that sound like you? But dear friends, look at this lesson. That's not the way God want us to view prayer! We can come to him with boldness and persistence - not because of who we are but because of who God is. In the person of Jesus our Savior, God sacrificed himself on the battlefield of the cross for you. He paid for the sins of the whole world. Since you are part of this world, that means he did that for you. He credits you with his righteousness. We, who were once slaves of the devil and destined for hell have been made sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus. We are members of his family and destined for heaven. We now have an invitation to come into the presence of the King. Enter with boldness and persistence, and know that God listens!

1. How does God want us to view prayer?
2. What error are we trying to avoid by saying that “we reject any view that looks upon prayer as beneficial only because it helps the one who prays feel better”?

*Prayer: Lord, help us have faith like Abraham and trust your promises. Amen.*

Another thing we learn from this week's lesson is that God invites us to pray and promises to hear and listen to our prayers. He lets himself be overcome by the prayers of his people and takes what we have to say into consideration in the way that he rules the world!

That's what he did in the case of Abraham. You heard it! "Lord, if there are 50 righteous; if there are 45; if there are 30; if there are 20; if there are 10; will you destroy the entire city?" And each time God answered by saying, "I will not destroy it for the sake of..."

It's incredible! The almighty God, creator of the world, author of life, and the one who holds all in his hands and controls all things allowed himself to be influenced by Abraham's prayer. Prayer is God's gift to his people to help us see ourselves not as helpless prisoners of fate, but active participants in how God directs his world. Remember that the next time you hesitate to pray thinking there is no point since God is going to do whatever he wants anyway.

Of course, it's good to remember that this doesn't mean that God will always do what we want him to do just because we are bold and persistent. We still need to recognize that we don't always know what is best, while God does.

1. Consider the words of James 1:5-8: <sup>5</sup>*"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup>But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup>he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."*
  - a. What does James encourage us to pray for at the beginning of this section?
  - b. What powerful promise about prayer does he give (verse 5)?
  - c. What does it mean that God gives "without finding fault"?
  - d. What is wrong when a person doubts that they will get what they are praying for? (verse 6,7)
  - e. Read Mark 9:21-27, and compare it with James 1:6,7. Does James mean that one doubtful thought is enough to render our prayer ineffective?

***Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your promises to me. Help me trust them with all confidence. Amen.***

Just because God had so graciously come to him, Abraham didn't get cocky and think that he could tell God his business. He approached in humility, submitting himself to God's will. He leaves it in the hands of the Lord. But knowing the grace of God, he knew that God's will is the best.

We will want to do the same. God knows what is best for us, and what is best for us may not be what we think is best. You see, God is looking at everything from the viewpoint of safely bringing us through this life with our faith intact so that we can enter heaven. So we will humbly submit to his will. What does that mean?

Well, we can put it this way. Submitting to God's will is not saying, "Here is what I want Lord. I think it is the way it should be done, but I guess you'll do it your way anyway, so I might as well concede to you." Rather, submitting to God's will is saying, "Lord, this is the best I can figure out with my limited knowledge and faith. You are much wiser and far more powerful than I can imagine. Do what you know is really best. Then I will make that my will and gladly request it instead."

Don't we see that play out in the words of our lesson. Abraham asked. He humbly submitted to God's will. God answered. There were not ten, yet God saved Lot and his family.

1. In what way does God know what is for our best?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Oftentimes people will ask their pastor to pray for them. Are we to understand that his prayers are more powerful or effective than ours?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Explain what it means that prayer is not a means of grace?

***Prayer: Dear Jesus, we take you at your word. Hear us and help us when we pray. Amen.***

Dear Christian friends. How is your prayer life with God? Would you say that you demonstrate prayer's importance in your life? Do you make prayer a priority, or is it often an afterthought or a crutch for tough times? Reflect on your prayers and prayer life. Do they sound like Abraham's: boldly trusting in God's grace and humbly submitting to his will?

My prayer for you, and not just for you but for me as well, is that we learn from our lesson today to pray boldly, persistently, and humbly submitting to God's will. I pray that we might be like the daughter of Scottish preacher. One day the preacher prayed in the morning service, while the sun was shining, that it would rain in the afternoon for the farmers. As he went to church in the afternoon, his little daughter said, "Here is your umbrella, Papa." "What do we need that for," he asked. "You prayed for rain this morning, his daughter said. "Don't you expect God to send it?" That afternoon it started raining.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, prayer knows no limits. Let us boldly trust God's grace and humbly submit to his will.

1. List the things which you feel are the greatest hindrance to your prayer life.
2. List things which may be the greatest help in overcoming them. Use the passages below to help.

*Danial 6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.*

*Acts 3:1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.*

*Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

*Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.*

*Daniel 9:2,3 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. <sup>3</sup> So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition*

***Prayer: Gracious God, comfort us with the knowledge that the Holy Spirit speaks on our behalf and that his prayers and ours will always be heard. Amen.***



There is much that we can learn about prayer from Abraham's petitions to God. Since this is the last sermon devotion for the summer, and there are still a few days left in August, let's stretch these devotions out by doing a little more study on prayer.

*Luke 11:5-13* <sup>5</sup> He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and tell him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,' <sup>6</sup> because a friend of mine who is on a journey has come to me, and I do not have anything to set before him.' <sup>7</sup> And the one inside replies, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give it to you.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even if he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

<sup>9</sup> “I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

<sup>11</sup> “What father among you, if your son asks for bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, would give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

1. Why did the man in bed get up and help?
2. In what way is our Father-King unlike the man in bed? How is that spelled out in verse 9?
3. Agree or disagree: When we pray for something and don't get it, we should conclude that it isn't God's will that we have it and should stop praying for it.

*Prayer: Our Father in heaven, thank you for making us your children in Christ. Help us grasp all the benefits of this gracious relationship. Amen.*

Over the course of the next few days we will take a look at the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is not the only way to pray, but it is a pattern for us to follow. Sewers use patterns. When they use the pattern, the company gives the guarantee that they will end up with the article of clothing like the one pictured on the cover. Over time, the sewer may develop the ability to sew without the pattern having learned the basics they are able to apply skill freely.

God the Son gave us this prayer, so there is no doubt that everything that is requested is in perfect line with the Father's will and therefore will be granted. For this reason there is no greater prayer we can pray. In times of anguish, joy, and when we don't have the words to say, we have this. As God's children, we will not want to set this prayer aside.

*Luke 11:1-4 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*

*<sup>2</sup> He said to them, "When you pray, say:*

*" 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup>Give us each day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.' "*

1. What are we being taught when Jesus teaches us to address our prayers to our "Father"?

2. For what are we praying with the words of the First Petition – "hallowed be thy name"?

3. For what are we praying with the words of the Second Petition – "your kingdom come"?

***Prayer: Pray the Lord's Prayer, up to the second petition, consciously focusing on what you are saying and asking.***

Matthew 6:9-11 *“This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“ ‘Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.  
<sup>12</sup> Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.’*

1. For what are we praying with the words of the Third Petition – “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”?
2. For what are we praying with the words of the Fourth Petition – “give us today our daily bread”?
3. For what are we praying with the words of the Fifth Petition – “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”?
4. For what are we praying with the words of the Sixth Petition – “lead us not into temptation”?
5. For what are we praying with the words of the Seventh Petition – “deliver us from the evil one”?

***Prayer: Pray the Lord’s Prayer, petitions three through seven, consciously focusing on what you are saying and asking.***

## ANSWER PAGES

### PAGE 1

1. Why is the background to these words important to know? God doesn't just come to us in the Bible and tell us "pray." If that is all he said to us, it would be sufficient reason for us to pray. But God does more than that. He encourages us to pray, he invites us to pray, he entices us to pray by reminding us of his grace. That grace was on striking display in the words right before our lesson (the background). That grace is what made Abraham so bold and persistent in prayer. We can apply this to ourselves as well. God has been just as gracious to us. Therefore we can be just as bold and persistent as well.
2. Consider the two passages below. How did Jesus demonstrate prayer's importance? Jesus' demonstrates prayer's importance by the time and effort he took to withdraw from the crowds so he could be alone to pray. In this he leaves us an example. In this he also keeps a perfect record on our behalf for this too is part of his active obedience.

### PAGE 2

1. What is God emphasizing by saying that he "will go down now and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has come to me"? Doesn't God know everything? Yes, God knows everything. It wasn't that he didn't know what was taking place in Sodom and Gomorrah before he came to earth. But in using human and emotional terms to describe his activity, God is showing us that he doesn't act in a willy-nilly fashion. He doesn't go off "half-cocked." He is emphasizing that his judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah was not arbitrary. God knew the facts and he would act accordingly.
2. How do we know that a homosexual lifestyle is not just an "alternate" lifestyle? Because every biblical reference to it indicates that God does not consider it an "alternate" lifestyle. Rather, God Word forbids it. Consider that Leviticus 18:22-23 forbids homosexual acts and calls them "detestable." Romans 1:24-27 speaks of homosexual desire as "shameful lusts" and calls homosexual acts "indecent," a "perversion," and the "degrading of their bodies."
3. If someone came to church one Sunday who we knew was actively living a homosexual lifestyle, should we welcome them in? Most certainly we will. While homosexual acts and desires are sin, they are not unforgivable. It is important to remember that homosexual acts and desires are not sins in a worse category than lying, living together before marriage, drunkenness, withholding forgiveness from those who have hurt us, hate, envy, and so on. All sin is detestable to God and deserving of punishment. And sins of which we are not repentant will bring down the same judgment from God. The person who comes to worship and is actively living a homosexual lifestyle needs to hear the word of God the same way we need to. The word, and the Spirit working through that word, is the only way that person will come to see his sin as an offense to God, see a need to repent, and be motivated to hate that sin and no longer engage in those sinful acts. May God work in us a heart and spirit that stays away from a sinful judging that sees other people's sins as worse than our own. Yet at the same time, may God work in us a heart and spirit that calls sin sin, and calls sinners to repent and warns them of God's judgment if they don't. One final thing. Welcoming someone to worship who is living an openly sinful lifestyle is different than receiving someone as a member who is living an openly sinful and impenitent life.

### PAGE 3

1. What should keep us from having this attitude toward others: "Finally those people are going to get what they deserve! Good riddance!" The reality of our own sinfulness. So often when we fail/struggle to forgive; when we lose patience with others because of their faults and mistakes; when we find ourselves inwardly happy at other's misfortune, it is because we fail to remember and realize just how wretched of sinners we are. We fail to remember that we have sinned against our God in ways much worse and ways far more often. We fail to remember that it is only by God's grace that we have not received swift and just punishment from Him. Remembering these things will lead us to be patient and forgiving to others and people who are seeking the good of others, no matter what they have done.
2. Who are the righteous for whom Abraham intercedes? In one sense there is no one who deserves deliverance from God's anger. After all Paul writes, "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). However, those who are righteous are those who are righteous by virtue of their faith in God, in

other words, believers. We see from how the account turns out that there were not even 10 believers in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet God, in his incredible mercy and grace, still grants Abraham's prayer as he brings Lot and his family out.

3. In what ways do we fail to take our sin and God's holiness seriously? The devotion lists a few ways. Perhaps you can think of others. It is good for us to realize what the real crime in adultery, gossip, stealing and the like is. The real crime is that I did not fear and love God enough to do what pleased him. That is the real shame, the measureless guilt, the horrible crime. We didn't take God seriously.

#### PAGE 4

1. Explain/discuss: "It's only when we take our sin seriously and God seriously that grace truly can become grace." Only when we grasp the greatness of our transgression and God's seriousness about that transgression, will we long, hunger and thirst for God's solution to our problem. It is precisely when we are serious about God and his Word in the law, that we will treat the gospel with the utmost joy and respect and wonder and awe.
2. What is it that enables us to be bold and persistent in our prayers? God's grace and promises.
3. Why do our prayers delight God? The prayers of God's children in Jesus delight him because we are taking him at his promises and living by them. In Psalm 50:15 God proclaims to us, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." The mere acts of believing God's promise to hear us in trouble and running to him in prayer honor him. Whenever believers turn their eyes heavenward to thank God for blessings or seek future blessings for themselves or others, they make a powerful statement that they trust not in themselves but in their gracious God and his wonderful promises. God delights, therefore, in our prayers because they boldly proclaim before the world that we have taken to heart his promises: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5,6).

#### PAGE 5

1. How does God want us to view prayer? He wants us to view pray as something powerful and beneficial. He wants us to view it as coming into the presence of the King with boldness and persistence because of who he is and not because of who we are. When we understand who it is that invites us into his presence in prayer, we will have a high view of how awesome prayer is.
2. What error are we trying to avoid by saying that "we reject any view that looks upon prayer as beneficial only because it helps the one who prays feel better"? Some do not believe that prayer has any real power or that the true God actually hears and answers prayers. They teach that prayer is beneficial merely because we feel better when we unburden ourselves by going through the motions of prayer. Prayer for them is simply a psychological release or aid. While it is true that prayer brings a psychological relief, that is not the primary reason we pray. We are convinced that the greatest comfort of prayer is knowing that we have a promise from Jesus: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

#### PAGE 6

1. Consider the words of James 1:5-8: <sup>5</sup>"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup>But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup>he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."
- a. What does James encourage us to pray for at the beginning of this section? He encourages us to pray for wisdom.
- b. What powerful promise about prayer does he give (verse 5)? God gives generously to all. James is echoing, in a way, the words of Jesus in Matthew 21:22 "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." With those words Jesus is not just talking about faith, but is primarily talking about believing in God's ability to give whatever we ask. Of course, the doubting voice of our sinful nature wants to immediately question whether Jesus really means what he says there. Is God really going to give us anything we choose to ask from him? Jesus' words are plain. But of course, today's devotion reminds us that we want to ask according to God's will. That doesn't cast doubt into Jesus' "whatever." Agreeing with God's will does not create doubt about our receiving, rather it gives greater assurance.

- c. What does it mean that God gives “without finding fault”? God is not like the person who criticizes you for getting yourself into some situation or who reminds you how many times he’s had to help you. God gives us his help freely. Remember that when it comes to our prayer life!
- d. What is wrong when a person doubts that they will get what they are praying for? (verse 6,7) It demonstrates a weakness of faith (not that faith is gone). This weakness of faith is like the disciples when Jesus’ calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus said, “You of little faith.” He wasn’t talking about saving faith, but faith in the promises of God. When a person doubts, they have little faith in the promises of God.
- e. Read Mark 9:21-27, and compare it with James 1:6,7. Does James mean that one doubtful thought is enough to render our prayer ineffective? All of us must exclaim, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.” Our faith at times is weak. As a result, doubts can cross our minds too about whether God really hears and answers our prayers. What James is telling us is do not let doubts dominate your thoughts. When the doubts come, run to the word which helps dispel those doubts.

PAGE 7

1. In what way does God know what is for our best? He knows what is best because he knows what is best for us and the refining and training of our faith so that we safely make it to our home in heaven. When we understand that everything God does he does with that end goal in mind, then we can humbly submit to his will when it comes to our prayers.
2. Oftentimes people will ask their pastor to pray for them. Are we to understand that his prayers are more powerful or effective than ours? There is nothing wrong with asking another Christian, including a pastor, to pray for us. The Bible urges us to pray for one another in our needs in life (James 1:16). One Christian’s prayer is not more valuable or powerful than another’s. In Christ we are all equal before God. Believers do not pray on the basis of their own righteousness or goodness but on the basis of Christ alone. Everyone whose trust is in Jesus Christ has the same power of prayer as anyone else whose trust is in him. James makes that point powerfully as he compares each of us to the prophet Elijah, “Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:17,18). James reminds us that “Elijah was a man just like us.” Since everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is a child of God who has been washed and declared righteous in the blood of Christ, we all have the same access to God’s throne of grace! The prayers of all such sinners declared righteous in Christ are indeed “powerful and effective” (James 5:16).
3. Explain what it means that prayer is not a means of grace? The direction of prayer is from us to God. Prayer is the privilege that God has given us to communicate to him our thanks and praise and our needs and concerns for ourselves and all others. Scripture does not promise that God will strengthen our faith or increase our knowledge through prayer. God does promise that he will do that through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. Through the gospel, God the Holy Spirit comes to us and gives us faith, strength, comfort, and knowledge. Prayer by itself is only half of our communication with God. The other half is God’s communication with us through the Bible. Prayer and study of the Word make for a beautiful two-way communication with God by which we speak to him and he comes to us. To put it another way, “faith comes from hearing the message” (Romans 10:17) and not from our prayers. That is why we don’t direct unbelievers to prayer in order for them to find the Savior; we simply proclaim the truth of the Savior so that the Holy Spirit may work faith in their hearts. Prayer is a fruit that springs from faith. Faith does not spring from prayer.

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1. List the things which you feel are the greatest hindrance to your prayer life. Some answers might be: doubt, lack of regular prayer; lack of time, busy-ness, worry; distractions like recreation, TV, the Internet, hobbies.
2. List things which may be the greatest help in overcoming them. Use the passages below to help.  
*Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. These two passages emphasize setting aside special time as an individual or group for prayer*



*Acts 3:1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.*

*Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. This passage speaks about clearing the mind and relaxing, like Jesus did as he withdrew to quiet places to pray*

*Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. These two passages emphasize how the reading of the Bible and prayer go hand in hand.*

*Daniel 9:2,3 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. <sup>3</sup> So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition*

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1. Why did the man in bed get up and help? He didn't get up and help because he was a friend. Instead, he got up and helped because of the man's persistence.
2. In what way is our Father-King unlike the man in bed? How is that spelled out in verse 9? Our Father-King is EAGER to help and answer prayer. This is spelled out in verse 9 as the continuous nature of what Jesus is saying comes across as he says, "keep on asking...keep on seeking...keep on knocking"
3. Agree or disagree: When we pray for something and don't get it, we should conclude that it isn't God's will that we have it and should stop praying for it. Unless God gives us a clear answer, then we keep praying. Jesus wants us to do more than pray about something once and then stop. Our life as a Christian is to be characterized by persistent prayer. Sometimes it might not be God's will that we have it. Sometimes it may not be God's will that we have it right now. Sometimes it may be God's will to give it to us after we have persisted in prayer for a time.

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1. What are we being taught when Jesus teaches us to address our prayers to our "Father"? As an earthly father who delights to listen to his child and grant his child's requests, so we are to approach the Lord of heaven and earth. By faith he is our true Father and we are his dear children, thanks to Jesus. Therefore he is teaching us to pray boldly and confidently.
2. For what are we praying with the words of the First Petition – "hallowed be thy name"? This doesn't mean to make his name holy, because God's name is already holy all by itself. It means that we are praying that he help us keep his name holy and regard it as completely holy. The Father's name is his reputation, that is, everything we know about him. How do we keep his name holy? By protecting and honoring his will and his plan of salvation. By teaching his word truthfully and without error. By living his word faithfully. Thus, we are praying that God would help us teach and live his word in a way that keeps his name holy.
3. For what are we praying with the words of the Second Petition – "your kingdom come"? What is God's kingdom? God's kingdom is Christ's rule in our hearts by faith. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This work the Holy Spirit accomplished through the preaching of the Word. Why do we continue to pray for God's kingdom to come if Christ is already ruling in our hearts by faith? We pray for the strengthening of faith and that others may be brought to faith. We are praying for the preaching and teaching of the Word when we pray this petition. That God send his Holy Spirit, so that Christ may rule in our hearts and in the hearts of others.

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1. For what are we praying with the words of the Third Petition – "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? As children of the heavenly Father, we want to follow his agenda. His agenda has already been established in the earlier petitions – that his name be kept holy and that his kingdom come. Therefore, with this petition we are praying two things. One, that through his Word the Holy Spirit would continue to lead us to accept our Father's agenda in our hearts. Two, that the Lord would stop those things outside of us that also hinder the Lord's agenda from being accomplished. This would include the forces of Satan and the influences of those who follow Satan in their lives. It would also include the temptations of the

things of this world. We don't have the power to do this on our own, so in this petition we are asking for strength to resist, as well as for the Father's intervention to crush the forces of evil.

2. For what are we praying with the words of the Fourth Petition – “give us today our daily bread”? Food and all other things that God promises to give us for our bodily needs is what is meant by daily bread. Therefore, in this petition we make our request for all the material things we need. He teaches us to realize that everything we receive for our bodily needs is a gracious gift of our heavenly Father. It also teaches us to receive all our bodily needs with thanksgiving. By the very fact that there is only one petition – this one – that deals with our physical need, Jesus gives us an important pattern for our prayers. Material things are secondary. Seek first his kingdom.
3. For what are we praying with the words of the Fifth Petition – “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”? By teaching us to pray this he is teaching us that we are sinners who have a need for forgiveness. Our sins are so many and so great that we have need to pray this petition every day. It is a plea that the Father in heaven would help us recognize and trust in his forgiveness so that our consciences might be quieted and no longer trouble us. It also contains a warning from our Savior. There is no forgiveness for the unrepentant and proud heart. So if our hearts become conceited and refuse forgiveness to others after the Lord has freely forgiven our sins, then like the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23-35) we will be cast into outer darkness. We are praying in this petition that the Lord would keep us from such unbelief and conceit.
4. For what are we praying with the words of the Sixth Petition – “lead us not into temptation”? What is meant by temptation? Temptation is any situation in which we are led astray into false belief (disagreeing with God's Word), despair (not believing God loves you), or into great and shameful sins. Those that tempt us are the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. Therefore, as we pray this, let us understand that our Father would never tempt us to sin. However, as long as we are on this earth, temptations from the evil three will always assail us. So, we are praying that the Father would sustain us and be with us in the midst of these temptations so that we do not succumb to them but rather stand firm to the end. It is a prayer for the strengthening of faith by the sending of the Spirit through the Word. We could say that in this petition we are praying not for relocation (away from the temptation) but for reinforcement.
5. For what are we praying with the words of the Seventh Petition – “deliver us from the evil one”? What is evil? Evil is all the bad things that are part of our lives as a result of Adam's fall into sin. This petition reminds us that we are in a mortal combat with the devil himself. And just as we, on our own, couldn't overcome Satan to free ourselves from the eternal punishment of hell, so we cannot be victorious over him in our daily struggle to do the will of our heavenly Father. Therefore we pray that the Lord would daily destroy the devil's deeds in us so that we do not fall into sin. We pray that the Lord would help us overcome, to run the race and finish, to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life. In this petition we are praying 1) That God in his wisdom and grace keep evil from us; 2) That God in his grace and power would work evil for our good; 3) That God in his love and mercy would give us the grace to bear evil; and 4) that God would bring us safely through all the evil of this world to our heavenly home.