

“FORMS OF PRAYER: Gimme!”

A Sermon by

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Texts: Psalm 86, Hebrews 4:14-16 and Philippians 4:19

Psalm 86

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.

2 Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.

You are my God; 3be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.

4 Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

5 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

6 Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.

7 In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.

8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.

9 All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

10 For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.

11 Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

12 I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name for ever.

13 For great is your steadfast love towards me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

14 O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.

15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

16 Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;

save the child of your serving-maid.
17 Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Philippians 4:19

And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

I have a good friend whose daughter is the same age as our daughter. George once related the story of taking Mandy to the grocery store. She was in the child seat of the grocery cart. As they arrived at the cash register, Mandy pointed to the candy bars, said, ‘Gimme,’ and then reached for candy. George told her, “No! It’s too close to dinner time.” She persisted. “Gimme!”

Again, he told her, “No!”

George turned and proceeded to unload the cart. He was no longer watching Mandy, who had reached out and helped herself to a Snickers bar. When it came time to pay, the cashier said, “I am going to have to charge you for that Snickers bar.” I wish I could have been a fly on the wall. George is one of the most easy-going, genial people I know, but not that day.

George’s response was this. “You heard me tell my daughter ‘No’ twice. She is three years old. You are an adult. The manager of this grocery store is an adult, I assume. If an adult places candy and gum within the easy reach of a three-year-old in a grocery cart, you know exactly what to expect. Children will help themselves, even if they are told ‘No,’ just as my daughter did. I do not see this as my fault. I was unloading groceries. Also, it’s not my daughter’s fault. She is three. I suggest you have your manager pay for the candy bar.”

We have all visited enough stores to have seen a child cry “Gimme” and then melt down when denied what they want. That is “Gimme” at its worst, extortion in the form of a temper tantrum. No parent likes to experience that.

Is “Gimme!” a valid form of prayer? I guess it depends upon how it is used. It can be a request, a plea, or a demand. When Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray with the Lord’s Prayer, one of the lines is obviously a “Gimme!” prayer.

“Give us this day our daily bread” is the essence of the “Gimme!” prayer. It is not a demand. It is a request. James the half-brother of Jesus writes that, *“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* (James 1:17) That Scripture is immortalized in a line from one of my favorite hymns, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” You know the verse, “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father. There is no shadow of

turning with Thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not. As Thou has been Thou forever shalt be.”

If God is the source of every good gift, then God’s children are invited to appeal to the Father for what they need. Paul, writing to the church in Philippi, speaks to God’s provision when he writes, “*And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 4:19) God not only permits our requests that He provide for our needs, but God invites our petitions. In Matthew 7:9-11, Jesus speaks these words, “*Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?*”

But, how shall we ask? How do we receive what we need from God?

First, we must ask with humility. Repeatedly, throughout Scripture, from the Psalmist, to Isaiah, to David, to the apostle James, we hear a consistent message. Psalm 9:17 declares, “*O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek. . .*” Psalm 51, David’s penitential Psalm tells us, “*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*”

God desires to be in relationship with us. God wants us to know God and love God. The problem from our side is that we want to be God. We want to control our own destiny. We want to make our own choices. Frequently, though, we run into something beyond our ability to cope. We find there are things we cannot provide for ourselves. We are in need.

We must ask.

During construction of Emerson Hall at Harvard University, president Charles Eliot invited psychologist and philosopher William James to suggest a suitable inscription for the stone lintel over the doors of the new home of the philosophy department.

After some reflection, James sent Eliot a line from the Greek philosopher Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things."

James never heard back from Eliot, so his curiosity was piqued when he spotted artisans working on a scaffold hidden by a canvas. One morning, the scaffold and canvas were gone. The inscription? "WHAT IS MAN THAT THOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM?"

Eliot had replaced James's suggestion with words from the Psalmist in Psalm 8. Between these two lines lies the great distance between the God-centered and the human-centered points of view.

God is sovereign. Simply put, God is God and we are not. Man is not the measure of all things. Therefore, we do not command God. We do not approach God arrogantly. We can make no demands. We cannot bargain with God as if we were approaching an equal. We must always come from a position of inferiority and weakness.

Therefore, we must ask.

We must ask in humility. James 4:6 reminds us that “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” God is aware of our needs, our hopes, our desires. God is fully alert to our wants and desires to give His children good things. It gives God pleasure to meet our needs.

Why? God understands us because Jesus has walked in our skin. Jesus, God in the flesh, has fully experienced what it means to be human. He knows fully the limitations of the human body. He knows hunger, thirst, love,

joy, pain, sorrow, temptation, loss, laughter, and anger. He knows what we need and is sympathetic to those needs.

The second Scripture lesson from Hebrews this morning puts it very well. *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15-16)*

Last Sunday we sang, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” It is one of my favorite hymns. The second verse contains these words, “Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our troubles share? Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.”

God invites us to ask. God welcomes our supplications. Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:6-7, *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”*

God cares for us. The “Gimme!” prayer is permitted because God cares for us. God understands our need and with the compassion and caring of a loving Father desires to meet our need when we ask.

We must ask in humility. **We must also ask in faith.** In Mark 11:24 Jesus says, *“So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”* Note that there is a sequence and order in this passage.

Ask. Believe. Receive.

In Mark 9:23, Jesus tells us, *“All things can be done for the one who believes.”* Belief is essential. Faith is paramount. If we do not believe that God can supply what we need, that God can answer the “Gimme!” we bring, why pray? Why ask?

One of the central themes of the New Testament is grace through faith. God makes his grace and mercy available solely based on faith. Salvation comes by faith. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)*

There are a lot of ‘whosoever’s in the world. I’m one. So are you. For all the ‘whosoever’s, God provides. God makes a way. However, salvation is not automatically given to anyone. We must ask. We must say, “Gimme!” We must receive what God provides.

The same is true for any other grace or gift of God. If we want anything that God is willing to give, we must ask in faith.

When LuAnn and I drive to Ohio to visit our daughter, we pass through Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. We pass an Assemblies of God Church called the “Love Church” at the southern edge of town. Back in 2009, Zev Chafetz, a secular Jewish writer for the New York Times, visited the Love Church on Easter Sunday. This is what he writes, “The chapel looked like a Holiday Inn meeting room. The music was not modern Christian praise music but the same old-time music that Elvis sang as a boy at the East Tupelo First Assembly of God. As the choir rehearsed, Zev sat in a pew taking notes and soon he was surrounded by young people. In a very natural way, they began to testify to him.

"I prayed to Jesus when my grandmother broke her leg," a little girl said. "Now she can get by herself to the bathroom."

"Amen," the kids said.

"I prayed over my sister and cured her asthma," a teenage girl said. She wasn't bragging. She just wanted him to know. "A boy named Wayne was burned in a fire," another boy said. "The whole church prayed for him, and now he's getting around without a walker."

There are some 300,000 churches in America, and Zev says he could have picked any one to attend on Easter morning, but he liked being in this one. Especially the kids. They didn't need prayer techniques, sophisticated suburban Jewish prayers of Thanks! offered to whom it may concern. They didn't pray to de-center their egos or find transcendence or to set off on a lifelong therapeutic spiritual journey. They prayed to a God with whom they were on a first-name basis, and they believed their prayers gave them power, which they used on behalf of their asthmatic sisters and infirm grandparents and a kid they knew with burns on his body.

Sitting in church on Easter morning, Zev says he realized that he was probably never going to become a praying man. But if, by some miracle, he ever did, he says he hopes his prayers will be like the prayers of the kids he met at the Love Church in Berkeley Springs.

They prayed for others in humility and faith and saw God answer their prayers. If we are to receive from God, we must ask in faith.

Finally, we must also ask with expectancy. This may sound a lot like faith. What is the difference between faith and expectancy? Are we talking about a distinction without a difference when we use two different words? I don't believe so, at all.

Faith is the belief that God can. Faith, as defined in Scripture as, ". . . *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" (Hebrews 11:1) Expectancy is the belief that God will. It is one thing to have faith that God can do what you ask and quite another to believe that God will do what you ask. One is faith. The other is expectancy.

Expectancy is faith in action.

In the book, *The Circle Maker*, Mark Batterson tells a story about the early years of his church planting experience. He says that the church was in desperate need of a drummer. They asked God and prayed to bring them someone to play the drums, but no one came. They persisted in praying, over and over. Still nothing. Finally, they sensed God saying, "If you want a drummer, why don't you go get a drum set?"

This was a bit of a "if you build it, they will come" kind of moment. This idea hadn't crossed their minds before. They hadn't had the idea to take a step of faith as if God was going to answer their prayer. So, they scraped together the money and managed to find a drum set that they could afford.

Even in doing that, Mark confessed that a part of him felt foolish and thought "Why am I spending all of our cash on a drum set for a drummer who doesn't even exist?" They bought the drum set on a Thursday and their first drummer showed up the following Sunday.

The lesson they learned here was that when we pray, we must get past the desire to want the answer before we exercise our faith. If we want God to move, sometimes we must make the move first. We need to pray expectantly and actively.

The Lord's Prayer is interesting. When Jesus tells his disciples to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" it likely reminded his hearers of the Exodus. The exiles from Egypt were dependent upon God for everything. Bread miraculously fell from the skies each morning and collected with the dew on the morning grass. It didn't arrive in loaves delivered to the flap of their tents. The people had work to do. They were required to go out each day and gather what God provided. In addition, they could only gather what they needed for the day. If they gathered too much and attempted to save the leftovers, it would spoil by the next day.

God trained them in both faith and expectation. After the first day of the manna falling, they all believed that God could provide for their needs. By leaving their tents and going into the fields each morning to gather the manna, they indicated that they believed God would provide for their needs.

They acted on their faith with expectation.

When the Korean War ended, South Korea was left with many children who had been orphaned by the war. Relief agencies came in to deal with all the problems that arose in connection with having so many orphan children. One of the people involved in this relief effort related a problem they encountered with the parentless children. Even though the orphan children had three meals a day provided for them, they were restless and anxious at night and had difficulty sleeping. As they talked to the children, they soon discovered that the children had great anxiety about whether they would have food the next day. To help resolve this problem, the relief workers in one orphanage decided that each night when the children were put to bed, the nurses there would place a single piece of bread in each child's hand. The bread wasn't intended to be eaten; it was simply intended to be held by the children as they went to sleep. It was a "security blanket" for them, reminding them that there would be provision for their daily needs. Sure enough, the bread calmed the children's anxieties and helped them sleep. (<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-give-us-day-our-daily-bread-mean/>)

That is the kind of assurance we can have in praying the "Gimme!" prayer when it has to do with our needs. God will provide. We can trust Him.

"And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone be the glory. Amen.