

"God Loves It When His Children Nag and Pester Him"

Genesis 18:16-33

21 April 2024

Our big idea today is our sermon title, too. And, I hope it makes you want to pray more. I hope you realize what freedom you have when you pray. Freedom to pull a *Genesis-18-Abraham-just-won't-shut-up* kind of prayer.

Here's our big idea-

GOD LOVES IT WHEN HIS CHILDREN NAG AND PESTER HIM.

Ha! Isn't that wonderful? God loves it when we nag Him! Who *is* this God that we serve? Because, if your family is like mine, kids can pester their parents for things. Kids have a certain tenacity to them when they want something. They have this drive, this passion to nag until they get what they want.

Of course, as a parent, this is exhausting. To be continually bombarded by requests all day long just plain tucks you out. It's downright exhausting, and because parents are sinners, we often respond to constant begging in sinful ways. We get frustrated when our kids nag us, and we might even yell at them.

Okay. Enough about that. I feel guilty.

But, the good news of Genesis 18 is that God never gets exhausted by our constant requests. He never responds angrily. In fact, it's quite the opposite! And that's exactly what Proverbs 15:8 says-

The Lord abhors the sacrifices of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him. (NET Bible)

The Hebrew reads, "*the prayer of the upright is His pleasure/delight.*" That means that your prayers, Christian, bring God pleasure! They delight Him! Your prayers, my prayers, however weak and juvenile they are, however many times we nag God with them, they bring Him pleasure! So, it brings God tremendous delight when you bring your needs to His attention. Think about that, Grace. That ought to make you want to pray!

GOD LOVES IT WHEN HIS CHILDREN NAG AND PESTER HIM.

And, that's what we'll see in Genesis 18 today, so turn there in your Bibles. Abraham is gonna nag God *hard*. I mean, he is going to *nag* God. Abraham just keeps going on and on. Even when you read the passage, you feel it. You're like, "*Abraham, buddy. Slow your roll. You're pressin' your luck!*"

But, Abraham is a *friend* of God. And, that gives Him all kinds of freedom in prayer. Abraham knows that people who are friends with Jesus have a lot of freedom in prayer.

LOOK AT VERSE 22...

So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before Yahweh. Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" And Yahweh said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Did you see it in verse 23? Did you see the miracle? Verse 23 contains 6 of the most beautiful, mind-boggling, hope-giving words in the Bible:

"...then Abraham drew near and said..."

Those 6 words deserve an underline or a highlight. Even if you're not a write-in-your-Bible kind of person, you ought to make an exception with Genesis 18:23. Abraham drew near to speak with God. And, so can we. We can draw near to God. Amazing. Never get over the miracle of that.

And, when we approach God, we don't have to come on our best behavior, or sneak up on our tippy-toes. We can just barge right into His presence! There's an old cartoon of *The Far Side* that is helpful. Here's what the caption says:

* INSERT THE FAR SIDE CARTOON

Luposlipaphobia: The fear of being pursued by timber wolves around a kitchen table while wearing socks on a newly waxed floor.

I'm not sure that's a real fear, I suppose it could be. In fact, I'm pretty sure that I would suffer some serious fear if I was being pursued by timber wolves around a kitchen table while wearing socks on a newly waxed floor!

But, when we approach God, just like Abraham here in Genesis 18, we don't have to enter His presence as if we were wearing socks and God just waxed the floors around His throne. Because of Jesus, we can barge right into God's presence. Even after we sin, we can barge in! Why? Because of the blood of Jesus! His blood has cleansed us from all sin! As Jerry Bridges says-

"It is not our contrition or sorrow for sin, it is not our repentance, it is not even the passing of a certain number of hours during which we feel we are on some kind of probation that cleanses us. It is the blood of Christ, shed once for all on Calvary two thousand years ago but appropriated daily or even many times a day, that cleanses our consciences and gives us a renewed sense of peace with God." (The Discipline of Grace, p.58)

When we sin, we don't have to wait to approach God! He doesn't stick us on "probation" for a few hours. I think that's how many of us think. We think we must stay away from God for a while, like we need some time and distance between us and Him. Like He needs time to cool off. And then after a while, we can approach Him. That's not true! We can barge in- *we should barge in!* - after we sin.

We don't have to make an appointment; we don't have to sit in the waiting room. We can barge right in. And, guess what's waiting for us when we barge on in? Mercy and grace. Hebrews 4:16 says, *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

We don't have to approach God like the floors were recently waxed and we're wearing socks. No. We can approach Him confidently! Why? Because of Jesus. Because we are covered with His righteousness. That's what gives us access into God's presence. We are covered with Jesus' righteousness when we approach Him.

Please understand this: Your pain and sorrow and worries and cares arouse God. They get His attention. I think that's what's happening here in Genesis 18. I think God knows how Abraham feels about Sodom being destroyed while his nephew Lot is still there, so God lingers behind so that Abraham can pour his heart out in prayer. I think God stayed behind because He knew that Abraham's heart was heavy over the destruction of Sodom, because Lot was there, and God opened the door of intercession for Abraham. It's like Abraham's sorrow and concern aroused God's heart.

So, Genesis 18 is very instructive for us. The God you approach with confidence in prayer, He loves to listen to every little heartbreak, every little detail about your grief, every need that you have. And that's why you can run to Him, you can barge in on Him, you can run unto His throne of grace, not having to worry about slipping on a banana peel, but running wild and free and pouring your heart out. And He listens. Oh, how our Father loves to listen to our prayers!

And, God doesn't treat His children's prayers the way we typically deal with some "User Agreement." Do any of you read *all* of the iTunes "User Agreement and Terms and Conditions" when it updates? No! You just lie (like all of us!) and click *"I acknowledge that I have read and understand the user Agreement"* and you move on.

God doesn't do that with your prayers! He listens and He "reads" every little detail, every paragraph, every sentence, every word, every verb, every subject, etc. And He listens to every cry and every moan and every muffled word and every unintelligible sound. And He even listens when you're sobbing like a baby and your pillow is soaked from your tears. He listens and understands when you are crying and praying and pouring your heart out. That's how Jesus works. That's the God of Genesis 18.

Now, you may get tired of talking to God, but He never gets tired of talking with you! Jesus never gets tired of your prayers. Jesus doesn't see you coming to His throne of grace and duck down another aisle. We do that, right? We see somebody at the grocery store that we don't want to talk to, and we avoid them; we duck down another aisle. Maybe we avoid them because we're not looking too shabby, and were hoping we wouldn't see anybody at the store. Or, maybe we just don't want to see *that* person, so we jump down another aisle to avoid them. Jesus doesn't do that with us when He sees us approaching. Our prayers actually please Him! Our prayers actually delight His heart.

And, not only can we draw near to Him, we can talk to Him, just like Abraham! As crazy as it sounds, God actually *desires* communion with us. Friendship. So, don't miss the miracle of this. We are children of the King of Kings. I love what Tim Keller said:

"The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 a.m. for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access."

We can wake up the Judge of all the earth in the middle of the night for a glass of water! And, that image of God as the righteous judge is what shapes Abraham's prayer. He says in verse 25, *"Far be it from you to do such a thing,*

to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

Abraham knows that Yahweh won't destroy Lot and family along with the wicked. It's why he's pestering God this way. But, it's that very question of Abraham's that gives us hope. That question of Abraham is something you can rest your weary heart on when you are full of questions. When you question God, and say things like, *"Why did this happen? Why did that happen? Why did God allow this? When is He going to answer my prayers? Why all this mess? Why? Why? Why?"*

So, what you do is pray those kinds of prayers: *"Why, why, why?"* Pray those. Load up your prayers with a bunch of "Why's?" But, then end a paragraph full of those kinds of questions by asking one more question: *Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right?* That's how you end sentences and paragraphs and chapters of prayers that are just full of questions of *"Why? Why? Why?"* You end those times of prayer with this question: *Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right?*

And, in that moment you preach to your heart, that the Judge of all the earth *will* do what's right. He *will* do good by you, Christian. He *will* do what's right on your behalf, and part of the right that He will do for you is Romans 8:28. He *will* work everything out for your good and His glory. You *will* see the goodness of the Lord, in the land of the living.

So, the 2 questions from Genesis chapter 18, to keep asking yourself when you have questions that you keep asking God:

Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Genesis 18:14)

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just? (Genesis 18:25)

So, as you ask God all your "Why?" questions, don't forget to sprinkle these questions in the mix:

"Why is this happening, Lord? Why? Why did things turn out this way? Why? Why? Why? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Why did you allow this, Jesus? I don't understand. Why won't you answer me? Why won't you intervene quicker? Why? Why? Why? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

Just sprinkle these 2 questions into the mix. Why? Because it'll help keep you from getting angry with God, becoming bitter, becoming hardened, etc. It will keep you from despair. And, it will recalibrate your heart. Just preach to your heart every once in awhile, *"Hey, heart! There is nothing too hard or impossible for Jesus. He will always do what is right."*

Okay. Let's get back to Abraham nagging God. It makes me a little uncomfortable the way Abraham just keeps pestering God, but it also gives me freedom to pray this way.

LOOK AT VERSE 27...

Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." And Yahweh went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

So, the 2 angels head towards Sodom and Abraham and Yahweh stay back. And, as Abraham stood still before the Lord, it's as if Abraham has connected the dots now. He now knows that God is going to destroy these cities and he has family there. His nephew Lot is there. I think Abraham knows that because Yahweh stayed back- and sent the 2 angels on- it was as if the Lord is opening the door to a conversation, so that Abram can intercede for Lot and his family.

So, we have Yahweh staying behind, and drawing near to Abraham, and he's drawing out the concerns and the cares of Abraham's heart. He's letting Abraham intercede for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord is listening to Abraham's pleas. It's like God is in his office, and He left His door wide open, and Abraham kind of peeks his head in, and says, *"Hey, Boss. Can we talk?"*

Abraham, being God's friend, just starts peppering Yahweh with questions. And, when you read it, Abraham kinda comes across as annoying, because he just keeps pestering God. He asks the question *"Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are 50 righteous in the city? Will you still destroy it?"* then on and on and on the conversation goes.

What about 45? *I won't.* What about 40? *I won't.* What about 30? *Still won't.* What about 20? *Won't.* What about 10? *Even for 10, I won't.*

I love this. It's like the Lord is in His office, and the door is always open. There's always an invitation to come in. He's waiting on us to come in and intercede, and to pour out our cares and concerns.

So, Abraham has been walking with Yahweh for 25 years. He's been a Christian for 25 years. A disciple for 25 years. He knows the character of his God. He knows that He is a God of righteousness, a God of truth, a God of justice. He knows that God will do what's right. And, knowing this about God, shapes his prayer. Abraham knows that God must deal with the wickedness of the sin of homosexuality and Sodom and Gomorrah. That's a no brainer. God must act. God must bring judgement, because as we'll see next week, everyone in this city is wicked.

But, Abraham also knows that his nephew, Lot, is a believer, a disciple, one of the elect that is in the city. So, Abraham is thinking, *"Lord, You're a God of justice. You have to do what's right. It wouldn't be right for you to kill Lot, because he's one of your children. He's family. You can't wipe him out with all these pagans."*

And, that's what's behind Abraham's prayer and intercession, where he goes back-and-forth with the Lord. When Abraham goes from 50 people to 45 people to 40 and on and on and on, he's trying to narrow it down to Lot and his wife and their two daughters. Abraham knows who Yahweh is, he knows Yahweh's character, and that is shaping his prayers.

Abraham knows that situations and circumstances- especially when they are really broken- are an opportunity for him to talk to His Friend. And, it's true for us, too. Situations and circumstances- especially when they are really broken- are an opportunity for us to talk to our Friend, Jesus, and to say to Him, *"This has happened and it's a sign that I should probably talk to You."*

All the brokenness that we experience in life- family, church, job, neighborhood, in our relationships, and in situations, and circumstances- they are all indicators to us that we should probably spend some time talking to Jesus. So, the next time you experience some drama with people or situations, take that as a sign that you need to get alone with Jesus and talk to Him about it.

Alec Motyer said, *"He loves us to talk to Him. He says, 'I want you to tell me. Please, open your heart to me. Let me know how you feel. Let me know where you hurt. Let me know what you want. What do you want me to do for you?'...An essential part of prayer is putting our prayer into words. Telling him all about it. Jesus said in one place, 'Your Father knows what you have need of before you ask.' Well of course he does, He's God! But He still wants us to ask."*

Alec Motyer just gave us a lesson in prayer:

- 1) *Tell God how you feel.*
- 2) *Tell God where you hurt.*
- 3) *Tell God what you want.*

What's going on in your life that's got you scared, full of fear, worried, stressing you out, and got your stomach in knots, and is keeping you up at night? *Just tell Jesus how you feel.*

What's causing you heart pain? What or who has broken your heart and crushed your dreams and plans for your life? *Just tell Jesus where you hurt.*

What do you want God to do for you? How do you want God to move in your life? What's just one thing you wish Jesus would do for you? *Just tell Jesus what you want.*

And, just keep telling Him how you feel, where you hurt, and what you want. Don't stop. Do it every day. Do it all throughout the day. Just keep pestering Him. And, when you feel like quitting, remember that-

GOD LOVES IT WHEN HIS CHILDREN NAG AND PESTER HIM.

Just Who is this God that we serve? Who *loves* to be pestered? Just Who are we dealing with here, Grace? Answer: We're dealing with the God of Psalm 34-

Psalm 34:15-18

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Who is this God that we serve? That's who. It's quite remarkable, but God actually loves it when we nag and pester Him. It brings Him pleasure when we alert Him to our needs.

Jesus *loves* for you to bring your needs to His attention!
Jesus loves for *you* to bring your needs to His attention!
Jesus loves for you to bring *your needs* to His attention!
Jesus loves for you to bring your needs to *His attention*!

In her children's book *Thoughts To Make Your Heart*, Sally Lloyd-Jones talks about the freedom we have as God's kids to pester and nag Him. She says-

Is it okay to nag God? And pester him?
God says we MUST!

God tells us to give Him no rest, to remind Him of what He has done and what He says He will do, and not to stop until He answers.

God loves it when we ask Him for great things! Because He is a King— and Kings love to do marvelous, powerful things.

*"Thou are coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask to much..."*
-John Newton

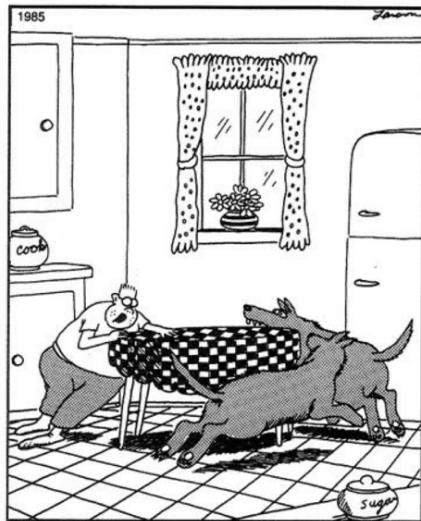
Sally closes the devotional with this verse from Isaiah:

"Take no rest, all you who pray to the Lord. Give the Lord no rest." Isaiah 62:6-7

What an invitation! We are called to give God no rest. We are called to not rest when we pray. And, still are called to rest in the Gospel that Jesus paid it all. The cross calls us to rest, knowing that we are God's kids, and not orphans. And, as God's kids who rest secure in our relationship with Him, we don't give Him any rest. We don't rest. We just keep nagging Him, pestering Him... 'cause *He loves it*.

"God Loves It When His Children Nag and Pester Him"
Genesis 18:16-33
Sermon Study Questions

1. Discuss how our prayers *please* the Lord: *The Lord abhors the sacrifices of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.* (NET Bible)
2. READ Genesis 18:23 and discuss these 6 incredible words: "...then Abraham drew near and said..."
3. READ Hebrews 4:16 and discuss how and why we might be tempted to have "luposlipaphobia" when we approach God (*Luposlipaphobia: The fear of being pursued by timber wolves around a kitchen table while wearing socks on a newly waxed floor.*)



Luposlipaphobia: The fear of being pursued by timber wolves around a kitchen table while wearing socks on a newly waxed floor.

4. Discuss what Jerry Bridges said: *"It is not our contrition or sorrow for sin, it is not our repentance, it is not even the passing of a certain number of hours during which we feel we are on some kind of probation that cleanses us. It is the blood of Christ, shed once for all on Calvary two thousand years ago but appropriated daily or even many times a day, that cleanses our consciences and gives us a renewed sense of peace with God."* (The Discipline of Grace, p.58)

5. Discuss this thought from the sermon:

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