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In This Way...Ask

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We could all see it coming. We all warned him. He would never make it. But being in high school, without any evidence that he had any development of his prefrontal cortex...Patrick didn't listen. He jumped in the truck...backed up about 50 feet, revved his engine, shifted into first gear and punched it with the goal of making it across a flooded, muddy field. But have no doubt, while we told him he would never make it, all the rest of us without any development of our prefrontal cortex's either...wanted to see him try. And try he did. And try and try and try. I think he made it 30 feet before he was so stuck, we could no longer see his tires. But the really fun part was jumping in the mud with Patrick to help push him out and then we looked up and there was Patrick's mom in her truck. She got out and laughed threw us a chain into the mud we hooked to Patrick's truck and along with our own pushing, get Patrick's truck unstuck.

Have you ever been stuck? Stuck in the mud? This year...stuck in the snow? Not so much. How about stuck in a job that you are not sure you are equipped for or that you are overqualified for? How about stuck in a relationship? Maybe you are taking care of aging parents, and each new day seems harder and harder. Stuck in a sea of decisions. Maybe your kids are struggling to find their way despite your best efforts. Stuck with parenting challenges you never could have imagined. Or maybe stuck in a marriage that seems to have lost the spark that it once had. About 18 years into our marriage this is where my wife and I found ourselves. Stuck. And to be honest we could see it coming probably in a couple of years. And our prefrontal cortexes were well formed. We were spending most of our time running our kids around, focused on all that stuff, not on each other and we were stuck.

It was even hard to admit that we were stuck, that we needed something akin to Patrick's mom to help us. But that's what we needed. We needed a third voice. A third voice to help us see ourselves and each other in some new and even in some old ways. We just celebrated our 25th anniversary, and

while she still has a lot of work to do, we are still guided by that third voice.

I also have to admit that when it comes to prayer, I get a bit stuck as well. My whole life has been spent connected to the church in some way. The practice and discipline of prayer has been pushed deep into my life. Many of you have experienced this as well. From Sunday School on we are told to pray.

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 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!
Matthew 7:7-11

Sometimes this bible verse gets us stuck because we do ask, seek, and knock all the time without receiving, finding, or having the door opened. And all of us have different experiences in asking, seeking, and knocking. But we are told to ask, seek and knock. We even have a big church word for this kind of prayer – Supplication... To earnestly and humbly ask, seek and knock. But sometimes no matter how earnest and humble we are, we can all get stuck. We can get stuck if we only see ourselves in relationship to all this asking, seeking, and knocking. We have a third voice. And that third voice is looking at the example of Jesus. Yes, Jesus tells us to ask, knock and seek but how does Jesus do that himself. Jesus just doesn't talk the talk. Jesus walks the walk.

We are in the middle of a message series called "In This Way..." where we are looking at the examples of how Jesus prays. He prays through being open, prays through praise. In this way... and today through, asking, seeking, knocking – prayers of supplication.

Here is the story as we find it in the Gospel of John. Jesus has a friend named Lazarus. A deep relationship has formed, and Jesus finds out that Lazarus is very ill. The expectation from the family, in this case two women named Mary and Martha,

is that Jesus would come and heal Lazarus. However, Jesus stays put. He stays where he is for two days. Here is what the Gospel of John writes.

After having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

John 11:6

What? Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Jesus – what were you thinking? Even when Jesus gets to Lazarus's tomb the grumbling of the crowd that has gathered gives voice to these concerns.

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" John 11:37

In fact, Martha and then Mary basically tells Jesus the same thing. But Martha adds an extra line. She adds...

But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him. John 11:22

And right as the stone is rolled away and before Jesus commands Lazarus back to life Jesus tells us that's what he has been doing.

So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me." John 11:41

We don't fully know all the things that Jesus was doing in that delay of two days, but he was certainly in earnest and humble prayer. Asking, seeking, knocking... for two days. But what was Jesus asking, seeking, and knocking for? Was it Lazarus – his friend to come to life again so he could be friends again? Was it so he would have a friendly place to stay, a place of safety just a week from his death as he does when he stays with Lazarus, Mary and Martha? Jesus doesn't hold the answer to these questions back from us, he tells all that are gathered.

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

John 11:40

Jesus spends two days in prayer... supplication... pleading earnestly and humbling asking for God to move in and through him for God's purpose. To reveal the glory of God, through Jesus, in a resurrected Lazarus.

Here is our third voice. When we are stuck in our prayer life – stuck in all kinds of asking, seeking, and knocking let us ask ourselves the question – the same question we ask of Jesus. What are we praying for? Are asking for our will to be done. Are we seeking ways for us to find our own way? Are we knocking on doors, so we get what we want? Are we stuck because we think if we only rev our engines and punch it that we will make it?

In this way...ask. May our prayers ask that first and foremost God's glory would be revealed in our lives and in our world. And what does God's glory look like? God's glory looks like life stones being rolled away through you. God's glory looks like life returning to the lifeless ones through you. God's glory looks like the drying of tears, through you. God's glory looks like new beginnings, through you. God's glory looks like a third voice, that through you brings healing to broken places. God's glory looks like jumping in the mud with a bunch of other folks to help push other people out of their stuck places. And yes, all of that is hard, you'll get dirty...but God's glory also looks like a bunch of people trusting that there is another truck with a chain on its way.