Have you ever called someone and heard a funny voice mail greeting? Here are a few I’ve come across.

Hello, if you’re hearing this, that means I’m probably trying to avoid you, so don’t leave a message.

Hey, hello and how do you do? Leave a short message, and I will get back to you.

Hey (small silence) what’s up (small silence)? Sorry I can’t get to the phone right now but leave a message and I’ll get back to you in like a year. Bye.

Sorry, we’re not here right now. Please leave your name and number after the tone. If you are calling regarding an outstanding debt, please leave your message before the tone. By the way, if you’re struggling with your finances, let me encourage you to sign up for Financial Peace University this fall. The Wall Street Journal reported this week that 1 in 3 Americans are delinquent on debt so my guess is that a lot of us could use some help. Beth and I got a lot out of this class when we took it last spring.

Hi, if this is one of my parents, I am at church. If this is my teacher, I am studying. If I owe you money, I mailed you a check today. So leave a message BUT...if this is my BFF or BF just say your name and I will pick up immediately. Thanks.

Aren’t you glad that when we call God He always picks up? When you call out to Him, He will answer. You’ll never get a busy signal or have to leave a voicemail.

We’ve been learning an important truth about God this summer – He makes promises and it’s His nature to keep those promises. I’m greatly challenged by what Charles Spurgeon once said, “Prayer is nothing but taking God’s promises to Him and saying, ‘Do as you have said.’ When you plead His promise, then your will is His will.”

I came across Psalm 145:13 recently: “The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made.” So far in our summer of promise series, we’ve looked at the promise of eternal life, the promise of guidance, the promise of the Lord’s return, the promise of rest and the promise of victory. Our topic today is “The Promise of Answered Prayer.” Here’s our main point: God loves to answer prayer when we want what He wants.

I want to draw our attention to a powerful prayer promise found in Jeremiah 33:3: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” One of my goals is that each of us will have this verse memorized by the time we’re finished. Let’s say it together.
The Text in Context

In order to grasp the greatness of this text, it’s important for us to understand the context. We’re going to dive in to some historical background, which some of you will love and others of you are already reaching for the snooze button. Listen. When we understand the surrounding and situation of a Scripture passage, it will make more sense and we’ll better be able to apply it to our own lives. Plus, it honors God when we approach His Word accurately.

Jeremiah was a mouthpiece of the Almighty and was charged with delivering mostly bad news to God’s people. Known as the “weeping prophet” because of his many tears, he was also bold and brave when communicating God’s message.

Due to the deliberate disobedience of the nation of Judah, after warning upon warning, God announced that they would be punished by Babylon. Their land would be decimated and they would be deported to a pagan land. In the midst of all this mess, God gives hope to Jeremiah by telling him to buy some property in Jeremiah 32:6-15, even though it didn’t make much sense because they were about to be conquered by this foreign army. This was God’s way of promising that His people would return, which they did, albeit 70 years later.

Speaking to Judah, the southern kingdom, Jeremiah’s message was not popular because it was not positive. We also need to be careful about just wanting to hear feel-good sermons or messages that promise health, wealth and happiness. With the Babylonian army surrounding the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah conveyed these weighty words from God in 32:3: “Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it.” Zedekiah, the king of Judah, was infuriated and therefore imprisoned the prophet.

As you read the book that bears his name, you’ll discover that Jeremiah was also thrown into a cistern (well), put in prison, and made a laughingstock. While most of us have not experienced anything like this, some of us can relate to feeling isolated, trapped, imprisoned by our past or chained to present habits.

God loves to answer prayer. In fact He promises to do so. That reminds me of the pastor who owned a parrot. All he would say is “Let’s pray, let’s pray.” While the preacher liked the spiritual nature of his feathered friend, he tried to teach him other sayings to no avail. He remembered that a deacon in the church also had a parrot with a similar problem, except that his female parrot would only say, “Let’s kiss. Let’s kiss.” He decided to try an experiment and convinced the deacon to let the parrots spend some time together in the same cage to see what would happen. The deacon’s parrot immediately proclaimed, “Let’s kiss. Let’s kiss.” To which the preacher’s parrot said, “Thank you Lord, my prayers have been answered.”

Let’s look at the first three verses in Jeremiah 33 to see how God promises to answer our prayers. God loves to answer prayer when we want what He wants.

Remember God’s Presence
Check out verse 1 where we see that God is always present: “Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the prison.” Jeremiah was confined, locked up and alone. He felt ignored, rejected and despised. Friend, no matter how alone you feel, you are never alone if you have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We’ll learn more about the promise of God’s presence on August 23-24 so I’m not going to develop this truth in depth today.

Reflect on God’s Power

God spoke into Jeremiah’s isolation and then He reminded him of his incredible power in creating the earth in verse 2: “Thus says the LORD who made it, the LORD who formed it to establish it (the LORD is His name).” Since God is the creator, He can handle any catastrophe or chaos that you’re going through right now. He has founded us, formed us and fixed us. If we turn back just one chapter to Jeremiah 32:27 we read these powerful words: “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?”

God invites us to call Him by different names, for each title reflects a different attribute and helps us understand a bit more about His majestic power. Last fall on Sunday nights we learned about the names of God. I encourage you to incorporate these names into your times of prayer.

- When you’re filled with anxiety, call out to Jehovah Shalom, the God of peace.
- When you’re in need of healing, reach out to Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals.
- When you wonder if God has left you, ask Jehovah Shammah, the Lord who is there, to give you assurance that you’re never alone.
- When you need God’s provision, cry out to Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides.

By the way, this fall our Sunday night series will be called, “Getting to Know God” as we marinate in His majestic attributes.

The title “LORD” in Jeremiah 33:2 is the name Yahweh which means, “I AM WHO I AM” first referenced in Exodus 3:14. This name was considered so sacred that when scribes would write it, they would take a bath beforehand and then destroy the pen afterward. The Jewish people held this name in such high honor and immense awe that when they would come to it in their reading, they would not pronounce it.

He is the covenant-keeping God, the ultimate promise keeper. Jehovah’s very name is a pledge of fidelity because He performs all that He promises. He always does what He says He will do. He never over-promises; and He never under-delivers. Since He created the world there is nothing that He cannot do in your situation.

Respond to God’s Promise

Because God is always present and always powerful, He will keep His promise. Let’s look now at verse 3 and break it down into three parts. Let’s say it again with the reference at the beginning and the end to get it in our heads and our hearts. Jeremiah 33:3: “Call to Me, and I
will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” Jeremiah 33:3. God loves to answer prayer when we want what He wants.

1. Call to God. Sometimes we make prayer more complicated than it should be. At its core, prayer is simply crying out to God: “Call to me...” The word “call” means, “to cry out, call aloud, to roar.” It was used to describe the cry of young ravens as they waited for food. It was also used of a child crying out for help when in danger.

Many have referred to Jeremiah 33:3 as God’s phone number because we’re invited to “call” Him. Several years ago a movie came out in which the writers gave God a phone number so the lead character could dial up the Almighty. Many who saw the movie wrote the number down and dialed it later. One lady in St. Petersburg, Florida had this actual number and received 20 calls an hour from people who wanted to talk to God. This shows that people want to call out to the God of power.

I’ll never forget visiting a friend several years ago in the hospital. He had just been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Two of his grandkids were there and he turned to them and said, “Call out to the Lord and you will find Him.” One simple sentence...that says it all.

As natural as prayer should be, even Jeremiah the prophet had to be commanded to call out to the Lord. This is an imperative invitation: “Call to me…” For some reason, we resist reaching out to God, even when we’re going through tough times. We’re a lot like Jonah who instead of crying out to God for help, went below deck and fell into a deep sleep. We need a wake-up call like he received from the ship’s captain in Jonah 1:6: “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.” That reminds me of the Lord’s lament in Isaiah 43:22: “But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; and you have been weary of Me, O Israel.”

Our sleepiness and Satan himself fight to keep us from crying out to God in prayer. When the disciples couldn’t keep their eyes open in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said this in Matthew 26:41: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

James 4:2 gives us a reason why we don’t receive answers: “Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” Jesus said it like this in Matthew 7:7: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Andrew Murray adds, “God’s giving is inseparably connected with our asking.”

2. Catch God’s Answers. After calling on the Lord, we need to be ready to catch His answers: “…and I will answer you...” God is never preoccupied or busy or away from the phone when we call out to Him. He promises to answer us. Psalm 4:3: “The Lord will hear when I call to him.”

But let’s be honest. It sometimes seems that our prayers are not answered, doesn’t it? One pastor offers some great perspective on prayer when he writes: “If the request is wrong, God says, ‘No.’ If the timing is wrong, God says, ‘Slow.’ If you are wrong, God says, ‘Grow.’ But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, ‘Go!’” Spurgeon had this
Even the Lord’s people ask for things which it would not be for God’s glory to give, nor for their profit to receive.” Philip Yancey adds: “By answering every possible prayer [the way we want], God would in effect abdicate, turning the world over to us to run.”

Before leaving this point, the Bible does put some conditions on God answering prayer. Here are ten that I’m aware of. I won’t take the time to develop them.

- Make sure you’re a born again believer. Hebrews 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

- Make your requests in Jesus’ name. John 14:13: “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.”

- Ask according to God’s will. Matthew 6:10: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God loves to answer prayer when we want what He wants.

- Confess all known sin in your life. Psalm 66:18: “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

- Live in peace with your spouse. 1 Peter 3:7: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

- Forgive those who have wronged you. Mark 11:25: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

- Make sure your motives are right. James 4:3: “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

- Stay close to Christ. John 15:7: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

- Listen to God’s Word. Proverbs 28:9: “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.”

- Be willing to share with the poor. Proverbs 21:13: “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.”

3. Comprehend God's Greatness. When we call out to Him and then catch His answers, we should expect the unexpected. God loves to go way beyond what we ask for as He puts His glory and grandeur on full display: “…and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” The word “show” means to make conspicuous something that was previously unknown. The word “great” means fortified and far away. And “mighty” reminds us that when we contemplate who God is and what He does, we’re humbled by His holiness. When we call out to God and we experience His answers, we are often overwhelmed by the awesomeness of God Himself as He comes near, revealing things that we did not previously understand.

I’ve been following a Bible reading plan this year that has me reading a different section of Scripture each day of the week. I’ve been struck by how many times God says something like this: “And then you will know that I am God…” especially as it relates to coming judgment. In Ezekiel alone, God says, “I am the Lord” 84 times! Here’s just one example from Ezekiel 5:13:
“And they shall know that I am the LORD.” God wants so much to have us see Him as great that if we don’t, He may allow us to go through adversity until we do. That’s what was about to happen in Jeremiah’s day as well.

God is great and He loves to show us new and mighty things.

- Isaiah 48:6 (ESV): “From this time forth I announce to you new things, hidden things that you have not known.”
- Ephesians 3:20: “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

A few years ago I attended the grand opening ceremony for the Pontiac-Oakland Automobile Museum in downtown Pontiac and had the privilege of meeting Jim Ewen. Jim was one of the designers for the “Performance Pontiacs” of the 60s, especially the Pontiac GTO. By the way, as a way to build gospel bridges, Edgewood is hosting a car show in our parking lot on Saturday, September 27th.

I asked Jim what it was like to work on something so amazing. I was surprised by his answer. He said that they didn’t know what they had when they were working on it: “I put in 60-hour weeks just like everyone else, just doing my job.” He had no idea how great these cars were until afterwards. As time has gone on, he now sees how monumental his work really was.

That’s kind of how it is for us. We’re called to be faithful team members as we live on mission for Him in our families, in our neighborhoods, workplaces, community, and to the ends of the earth. And there are times when we’re able to grasp just how great it is to partner with God in His mighty kingdom work.

We don’t have time to go through all of Jeremiah 33 so let me just hit some highlights of what some of those “great and mighty things” are in this chapter alone. God gives Jeremiah promise after promise while he’s in prison to give him hope while he’s hurting.

- I will bring healing and give abundant peace to my people (v. 6)
- I will bring my people back to the land (v. 7)
- I will cleanse them and forgive their sin (v. 8)
- Jerusalem will once again have honor and renown (v. 9)
- There will be sounds of joy and gladness in the future (v. 11)
- There will be pastures for the flocks (v. 12)
- I will raise up my righteous branch from the throne of David (v. 14-15). These verses speak of the coming of Christ, the ultimate promise: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”

A Call to Pray
Brothers and sisters, we must call out to God, we must catch His answers and then strive to comprehend His greatness. We can do that because of His presence, His power and His promise. Let’s quote Jeremiah 33:3 again: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”

Someone passed along this insight: “Whenever I am prayerless it betrays an underlying belief that I can do life and ministry on my own, which according to Scripture is certifiably insane.” I like what A.J. Gordon once said: “You can do more than pray after you have prayed; but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed.”

I don’t want to just preach about prayer; I also want to give some practical pointers and then we’re going to pray.

1. **Pray God’s promises back to Him.** When you come across a promise of God, simply bring that promise to God in prayer. Let’s do that right now, using a couple promises we’ve covered so far in this series.

   - Lord, you know that I need to rest in your victory. Thank you for your promise in Romans 8 that nothing can separate me from your love. *Because you are faithful, you are for me.*
   - Thank you that when I’m weary and worn out with hurts, habits or hang-ups, you promise in Matthew 11:28 to give me rest when I come to you.

2. **Pray Scripture passages back to God.** Closely related to praying a promise back to God, why not take an entire passage and pray it to Him. Or, when you come across one of the prayers in the Bible, make it your own. One commentator has counted 650 different prayers in Scripture. We did this with the Lord’s Prayer several months ago.

3. **When you’re finishing a conversation, end it with a short prayer.** I returned a phone call a pastor friend I’ve known for 15 years this week and when we were finished I asked if I could pray for him on the phone. When I finished, he prayed for me.

4. **Pray for your pastors.** Our Ignite Singles Ministry has been meeting with each of the pastors individually and praying from them during the ABF hour. They’ll be praying for Beth and I next Sunday morning. We can’t wait.

5. **Pray for the persecuted.** Our Iraqi brothers and sisters in Christ are in desperate need of our prayers right now.

6. **Pray for your neighbors and classmates and coworkers and family members.**

7. **Join students as they do prayer walks around their schools.**

Pastor Jeff and Alisha led a team of students out to Colorado for “Lead the Cause University” a couple weeks ago. One of the things they learned about was the importance of passionate prayer. I want to ask him a few questions so we catch what God did, and is doing, among our students.
• The students learned about the last and lasting mandate known as the Great Commission. Can you explain why this is our cause today?
• Why is it important that our students are living the cause before they lead the cause?
• The students were challenged to think about who is in their circle. What does that mean?
• Can you unpack the importance of praying, pursuing and persuading?
• You also learned about “4 Chairs.” Can you explain?

One of my favorite voice mail greetings is when I call and hear something like this: “Hi this is Lou. You know what to do.” When it comes to prayer, I imagine God saying, “Hi this is God. You know what to do.” We know we’re supposed to pray but many times we just don’t do it. Our problem isn’t that we need to know more about prayer; it’s that we need to grow in prayer.

Jonathan Edwards, the man God used as the catalyst for the 1st Great Awakening had this to say about prayer: “So it is God’s will that the prayers of His saints shall be the great and the principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ’s kingdom in the world. When God has something to accomplish for His church, it is with His will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayer of His people.”

→ As the worship team comes back up, Pastor Jeff is going to lead us in intercessory prayer right now.

Invitation: “Your Name”