

# Working in Hollywood

## *Unexpected Answers to Persistent Prayer*

January 15, 2023

*Today we're talking about persistent, and even long forgotten, prayers.*



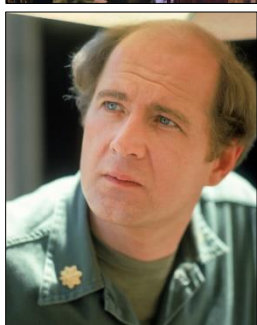
But first: **ever bump into someone you used to pray for?** What'd you do? Last Sunday, Noah showed us how the first steps of Christ-like love begin with an awareness of someone, followed by an action that leads to a connection. Well, **prayer is an obvious action that forms the first half of a future connection.** Plus, it lets you off the hook, cuz it puts the ball in *God's court* to complete the connection. So you can rest, as long as you're ready, whenever and wherever we bump into someone we've prayed for, to **watch for an unexpected door to open.** But don't expect it to open on its own. It's often just that: "a door to open". I went to *film school*, not *seminary*; and this morning, I'd like to reminisce about an *unexpected door* (actually a group) that forever changed the *course* of my *life*, by changing the way I perceive *prayer* and *partnering* with *God*.

In the '70s, I loved the show, MASH. Remember the young mother accusing Radar of being the father? She was played by Clare Nono – Pastor Nono's sister! I was *such* a fan, I began *praying* for the actors ... by their *character* names. Hey, I was *ten*. I prayed for 'em every night for about a *year* before I "*outgrew* it". Nine years later, I'm attending 3-hour night classes at UCLA, while working odd jobs for Apple One Employment Agency. And each night class was attended by a couple hundred *much older* adults. Like in their *20s* and *30s*! And I quickly convinced myself it was *dumb* to think I could break into such a massive industry. I wasn't some *Hollywood somebody's* kid. I was just a *kid*. And an *outsider*. *Literally*. I often ate my lunch across the street from 20th Century Fox. Cuz it was my *favorite* studio. Cuz it was *closed* to the *public*. Only VIPs and people with passes got past that guarded gate. So there I sat across the street *questioning* my *purpose* and *planning* my *future* while watching VIPs go in and out, and feeling ever *smaller*, and *disheartened*.

**What was my purpose?** Did I have a purpose? Was it to be *famous*? No. It was never *that*. I went because I wanted a way to *share* the *Lord* with the *world*. *Seriously*. I knew I wanted to *partner* with *Him* however *He* wanted. I just hadn't a *clue* what it was. So I *concluded* that **my purpose was to practice fearlessly following while we figured it out.** And, since it *seemed* He *wasn't* working in *Hollywood*, I *prayed* and *gave* Him a *week* to change my *mind*, before *giving up* and *going home*. But by the end of that week, I would come to learn that **God doesn't work in a place, but in people.**

The next night was my *favorite* class: Post Production with 71-year-old James Blakeley, head of post-production at ... *20th Century Fox*! And *that* night, he *reminisced* about working with *Abbott* and *Costello*, *Laurel* and *Hardy*, *Carry Grant*, *Clark Gable*, and *on* and *on*. And I *hung on* every word.

But during the break, many were complaining that he was wasting *our time* with *his stories*. So I waited in line, and *thanked* him and told him how much I *appreciated* him. And as I walked away, he said, “You forgot to tell me what you *wanted*.” I said that was *it*. And he yells out, “We have Hollywood’s *first!* This guy gave me some very nice *compliments*, and doesn’t *want* anything!” And he turned to the *line* and said, “Unlike *you*.” Everyone glared at me. But after class, he called me over, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, “How would you like a VIP pass to my studio?”



My *name* was at the gate! I got a *VIP pass!* I strolled the deck of the Love Boat, and explored prop rooms and soundstages. And when I asked a couple set constructors for suggestions, they pointed out a big building I’d seen, with a red light over a steel door that read: Restricted. Authorized personnel only. And they said, “That’s where they film MASH. And you’re lucky, cuz they only film on *Wednesdays*.” And it was *Wednesday*. And they didn’t know there was a *mix-up* at the gate on *Tuesday* – and how I’d had to *unhappily wait*. “But it’s restricted.” “You’re a *VIP!*” I said I didn’t have the *guts* to open the door. And one of ‘em says, “Just walk in like you’re *somebody’s kid*, and ask the door guard *where they’re filming*.” There’s a *door guard?! So they walked me over, stood back, and urged me on*. So I *opened that door*. Went *in*. Showed *no fear*. And was *directed to the MASH compound!* And they were *filming!* The episode revolved around Charles putting up with a *toothache for fear of the dentist*. **Hiding his pain. And self-medicating with alcohol.** You know, **the things we do to avoid what we know we should do.**

I stood *way in the back*, behind a huge *crew*. But a *cameraman*, clear up in *front*, *noticed me*, kept *glancing at me*, and *motioned for me*. *Caught!* I *thought*. Till he said, “You can’t see from back there. Stand here next to me.” He must’ve thought I was *somebody’s kid!* So I stood *next to the camera!* The action was happening *six feet in front of me!* And *that’s when I suddenly remember my 10-year-old prayers*. And I *broke out in a cold sweat*, and my *legs went weak*, and I silently said, **“Oh no. Please God, don’t make me talk to them.”** So much for *fearlessly following*. I *knew* Jesus said:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. – Acts 1:8 NIV

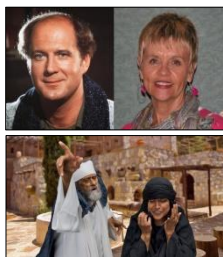
But I don’t see *Hollywood* on that *list!* What I didn’t quite understand, *yet*, was how ...

“This will be your *opportunity* to tell them about *Me* ... don’t *worry* about what to *say* ... you will be *given the right words* at the *right time*. For it *won’t be you* doing the *talking*— it will be the *Spirit of your Father* speaking *through you*.” – Matthew 10:18-20 NLT

And so, on a break, while exploring the set and avoiding *everyone*, I bumped into Charles. Full on *collision*. He said, “Sorry, my fault.” And I silently said, “*No, God!*” But as we parted, *he* turned back and said, “Who *are* you? What’s your *name?*” I said, “Bruce. Uh, what’s *yours?*” He *smirked* and said, “It’s only written in 50,000 TV guides. David Ogden Stiers.” And he *stared at me for a moment*, and said, “*Walk with me*.” And he found a *spot* where we could *sit and talk*. And I told him about *film school*, and *James Blakeley*, and my *VIP pass*. But *not about God!*

And he *complained* about all the *trash* being made, and said, “I *hope* you have a *purpose*.” And I said I *did*. And he said, “So what *is* it?” So I told him I hoped to help people understand who Jesus *really* is; like, not *religiously*, but *relationally*. And he asked an odd question: “**What’s your standing with God?**” I said, “Very *close*.” And I asked about *his*. And he said, “Very *distant*. But *open*.” And then He says, “So who *is* He?” And he asked about the *difference* between *religion* and *relationship*. Cuz you know, **a spiritual heartache is very much like a toothache**. And so, he questioned and I answered for about fifteen minutes before someone said he was *needed*, and he said, “In a *minute*.” And I quickly *shared* the *vitals*, till someone *else* came over and said, “David, *now*.” And he *jumped* up and said, “*That’s* the *director*. Gotta Go!” and *that was that*.

That *night* I was answering phones for a telethon for the Apple One Employment Agency. And a woman asked if she could get a ride to Van Nuys, which is where I lived. So I *offered*. And on the way, she says, “Are you a *Christian*?” And I said I am. She says, “I *knew* it; you’re practically *glowing*.” If she only knew! she asked about my plans. And I *told* her. And she said she’d put me on *top* of her *prayer list*. And *added*, “But, #2; cuz the top spot’s *reserved*.” I laughingly said, “For *who*?” And she said, “David Ogden Stiers.” **And the course of my life changed**. I asked her *why*. And she said she’d met him on a job, and *noticed* an *openness*, and just *felt*, like a *need* to *pray* for him. To which I said, “Well guess what I did today.” And we *talked* and *cried* and *prayed* in her driveway, about 10-year-old prayers, James Blakeley’s stories, a VIP pass, a mix-up at the gate, and two conveniently urging construction guys, all leading me to bumping into Charles. **Obviously I’m an omnipotent Somebody’s kid!**



I was an *answer* to her *current* prayers, my *past* prayers, and who knows who’s *future* prayers! News flash: **He doesn’t tell us everything He does. Or He’s doing. Or everyone He’s using to answer our prayers. He just asks for our trust**. And speaking of *future* prayers, David Stiers *died* in March, 2018; and later *that* year, (9-16-18) I briefly *mentioned* our *encounter*. And after service, Chic Stiers told me that David was her husband’s *first cousin*, and how he’d been in many prayers, and said: “Now, you did *what?!?*” Well, the Lord did say:

I will answer them before they even call to Me. While they are still talking to Me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers! – Isaiah 65:24 NLT

So did David get *saved*? I don’t *know*. Chic *heard* that he *had*. But that’s *firmly* our *Father’s* business. I can *only know* what He’s *done* for me. **We don’t pray or share, to get God to do our will, but to let Him use us, and teach us, and change us, as we learn to trust His will**. Remember when ...

[Jesus] was telling [His disciples] a parable to *show* that at *all times* they ought to *pray* and *not* to *lose heart* – Luke 18:1 NAS

It’s the parable of the *persistent widow* who *pleads* her *case* to an *ungodly judge* till she gets *justice*. And Jesus contrasts that judge to our loving Father. **Not suggesting we must overcome God’s reluctance to respond**; but making a strong case for persistence and patience when it comes to our prayers. Cuz, **one of the reasons is how much we grow and change in the process**. When my *son* was *young*, he wanted to ride his bike across *Cook Road*, and two miles to grandma’s house. “Absolutely *not*.” Now, it would’ve been easy to think I *didn’t want* him to ride his bike across cook road, and two miles to grandma’s house. But I *did*. **I just didn’t want him to die**.



For months he persisted. “What if I wear my *helmet and pads?*” “I *assumed you would.*” “What if I take *Joey* from next door?” “He’s *younger than you.*” “What if I *walk* my bike?” “What if I *call* when I get there?” I *finally* said yes. **Not because he wore me down; but because, he was learning from listening to my answers.** And he was ready.

You see, **unbeknownst to him, his persistence was for his benefit, not mine.** In the process, he came to *understand* my heart and mind, and **he became a son to whom I could finally, gladly, say yes.** And *that’s* how his persistence paid off.

This is the *confidence* we have in approaching God: that if we ask *anything according to His will*, He *hears* us. And if we know that He *hears* us—*whatever* we ask [*in His will*]*—we know that we have what we asked of Him.* [*According to His will*] – 1 John 5:14-15 NIV

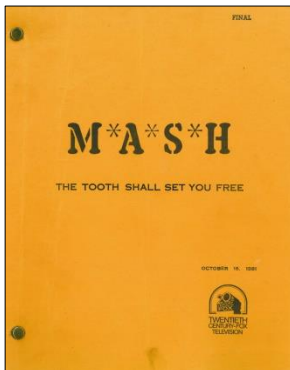
Cuz, *He’s* the Director. But we get the promise turned around, because we tend to forget who’s *actually* in charge. But **He won’t hear us if we’re pushing our will while disregarding His.**

Even if you offer *many prayers*, I will not *listen*. ... [*so*] *Stop* doing wrong, [*and*] *learn* to do right! Seek *justice* ... [*and*] *plead* the case of the *widow*. – Isaiah 1:15-17 NIV

Years ago I challenged the church to choose a specific person to persistently pray for. And a man named Mike saw quick results when the ungodly heathen he chose, suddenly started showing up on Sundays. Want to know who he *chose*? None other than *Pastor Noah!*

I’ve noticed that **the miraculous isn’t something you chase after.** It’s something that *sneaks up* and happens while you’re busy *living*, and *practicing following* Jesus. So **don’t try to force God’s hand. Rest under His wing and practice living your faith.** Cuz you’re not just anybody’s kid.

In 2007, James Blakeley died at the age of 97, still working at 20th Century Fox! And back in 1992, four years after I became senior pastor, Ken Ekle and I were offered a job writing for David Mirkin Productions ... at 20th Century Fox. They were quite shocked when we turned ‘em down in order to stay *here* – where God was doing some pretty awesome stuff.



And who wants to *die* at 20th Century Fox? I wanna *die* right *here!*

And by the way, I didn’t *give up* and *go home*. Cuz God *changed* my mind that *week*. Turns out, He *was* working in *Hollywood*. And **any kid can break in, if they’ll go through whatever unexpected door God offers** – *however reluctantly*. My purpose hasn’t changed. It’s still to serve the Lord, *whenever, wherever, and however* He wants. And to **practice fearlessly following Jesus, while we figure it out.**

They gave me a *script* that *day*, as a *souvenir*. And I still *have* it.

And that *particular episode* was called, of *course*, “The Tooth Shall Set You Free”.