

**5.2.21                                    God Listens and Answers When We Call            Psalm 86.1-3, 6-7**  
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How many of you own a phone? How many of you have it with you? Why do you have it with you right now? Never mind, I don't want you to answer that question. How many of you still have a land line? How many of you don't know what a land line is? I don't want to know the answer to that question either. Phones are an amazing invention that have evolved significantly over time. Some younger people might be surprised to know that once a upon a time, every person didn't have a mobile phone they took with them everywhere they went, even to worship. No, I swear that's true. There was a time when there might be one or two phones for an entire family and get this, that phone was anchored to a wall or if it sat on a table, it had a range limited by the length of the phone cord. At one time, there was no such thing as having a private phone conversation. Can you imagine? In the house I grew up in, the phone was on the wall in the kitchen. I knew when my sister was having a private conversation because when I walked into the kitchen from the hallway or the dining room, there was a phone cord going from the wall of the kitchen across to the door leading to our basement stairs. I had to be ready to do the limbo or risk being clotheslined if I happened to be running around the house and that cord was there tight as a string on a violin.

How do you react when your phone rings? When I was a boy, and the phone rang in our house it was an event. It was as if we were on-call volunteer fire fighters. It didn't matter what you were doing, if the phone rang, you sprang into action. Especially when you were a teenager and the call might be from a special someone, you wanted to get to that phone before anyone else. Which often meant if you had siblings, they wanted to do the exact same thing.

I also got in trouble more than once because someone from the church called trying to reach my dad about something and I was the one who answered the phone. They might even have been calling about something important such as someone going to the hospital and I'd say, "*Sure, I'll give him the message,*" and then I'd forget all about it. That only happened a couple times, I think, and my dad made it clear to me how important it was if I answered the phone to write down the person's name and number, after all, the phone wasn't going to remember it for me!

That's another amazing fact, the phone didn't remember any numbers for you. You either had to have them written down in something called a phone book or an address book, or you needed to memorize them. I'm almost 57 years old and I can rattle off the phone numbers of my childhood friends whose numbers I called hundreds and hundreds of times. I had more phone numbers in my head when I was 13 years old than I do now. You want to hear one of the shocking things about calling a phone number back then? When you called a number, you didn't know who was going to answer, and you had to speak to whoever answered the phone! Can you imagine? And it might not be your friend who answered the phone, it might be their mother or father, or sister or brother, and you had to be able to talk to them politely, intelligently, and clearly. As a result, not only did I have a good relationship with my friends, but I also knew all their moms and dads too because I occasionally talked with them on the phone. That's been lost with mobile phones and it's too bad.

If you want to track the development of phones, one fun way to do it is through watching movies from different eras. In the 1941 Oscar winning movie *Sargant York* starring Gary Cooper, York's family is shown talking into a new-fangled telephone which is on the wall of the store in their little town in Tennessee in 1918. By the time you get to the mid to late 1980's in movies you start to see some of the first phones in cars and they're big, like the phone you had in your house.

When I went to my first church in Pennsylvania in 1989, the phone on the pastor's desk at the church was still a black rotary phone that weighed about 20 pounds. You could have used it for a boat anchor. It took so much pressure to dial a number that I'd have a groove in the side of my finger by the time I got to the last digit. I quickly learned to use a pen or pencil to dial. I said to the trustees, "*There's these new things called touchtone phones, might be worth looking into.*" They said, "*Go ahead.*" When I did, I discovered the church had been paying ATT every month to lease that old rotary phone for so many years that we could have bought a phone for every member of the church and owned stock in the company.

Now mobile phones are smaller than a deck of cards and have more capability than anyone can process or use, but they're dependent on their network. Many of us can remember a long running ad campaign, "*Can you hear me now?*" Most of us still run

into moments when depending on where we're driving or the weather or the distance from a cell phone tower where we may find ourselves asking, "*Can you hear me now?*"

This is actually a very old question, one that's much older than phones, because it's a question people in various places and cultures have been asking God or the gods however, they conceived of them, from the beginning of time.

We're going to spend the next couple months in worship talking about what God is like. The God we worship as Christians has many different qualities. In Psalm 86 we hear at least nine attributes of God in that one prayer that gives thanks for God's characteristics that bless and enrich our lives.

The first one is that **God Listens and Answers When We Call.**

**Psalm 86.1-3, 6-7**

*1 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**; 3 **be gracious** to me, O Lord, **for to you do I cry all day long.***

*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.*****

The Book of Psalms is unique among the books of the Bible because before it became God's word to people, it was the words of people to God. Like the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms model for us how to pray. **Psalm 86** is a Prayer of David and a **plea for help against enemies** Psalm 86 and many others encourage you to **call on God** "*in the day of trouble.*"

Some of you may have seen the 1999 movie, *The Sixth Sense*. The film, which is not for children, is about a young boy named Cole Sear, played by Haley Joel Osment, who is tormented because he sees dead people. In a scene in a church where he has gone to seek sanctuary, we see a Bible in Latin text open to a passage that begins *De Profundis*. You may not have known that text is Psalm 130 which begins, "**Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!**" It expresses Cole's need and his heartfelt prayer. **Psalms 86 and 130 are powerful expressions of a theme at the heart of the scriptures: our need to call out to God in our distress and to know God hears and answers when we call.** We see this throughout the Bible from the Israelites enslaved in Egypt to Moses and Elijah interceding for God's people, even the

pagan sailors in the book of Jonah, and so many people in the Gospels in need of healing crying out to Jesus as he passed by, calling for help.

Sometimes when we call people, we don't reach them immediately, they don't or can't pick up because they don't have their phone with them, they're on with someone else, they're working or doing something else. They may even have their phone off. It can feel that way when we call God sometimes. We call, often repeatedly, and feel like we get no answer; that no one "picks up," or is there. Has this been part of your life experience? This feeling that no one's there happens to all of us at different times and it isn't easy. We shouldn't pretend that we can explain why this happens. It is a mystery. Sometimes when I'm talking with someone on my mobile phone and I "lose them" I will say something like, "I can't hear you, I don't know if you can still hear me, but I'm going to keep talking for a bit and hope we can hear each other again." Sometimes you hear one another again. Other times, the call is lost. Calling out to God in prayer can feel like that sometimes.

If you're calling for help in an urgent or even a life-or-death situation, you desperately want the person you're calling to answer and listen to what needs to be communicated. Some of us have called on God in situations like that and God didn't listen or answer when we called the way we desperately hoped God would. How many millions of people through the centuries have cried out to God in a moment of fear or desperation and yet they perished. Many of them may have died feeling abandoned or that God had let them down. One of the things about having faith is we need to humbly remember, especially those of us who have been following Christ for decades, that there is plenty of evidence to cause people to come to a different conclusion than the one we've reached by grace and faith.

Psalms 86 is a plea for help in a time of trouble, but it's largely a prayer telling God about God, it emphasizes the character of God, rather than a prayer telling God about me and my problems. It's like David is reminding God and himself, who God is, and in doing so, it's comforting for David to recall what God is like; this God he worships, serves, and calls on in prayer.

One of the helpful innovations for phones (for a while anyway) was Caller ID. In former times when the phone rang, you had no clue who was on the other end. It was a

surprise. Now when the phone rings, if I don't recognize the number or name, I don't even answer. I'll see if the caller leaves a message. Most of the time they don't because it's no one I know. It's a sad truth that anything touched by people can be corrupted and unscrupulous people and businesses now mask their true number and what shows on your phone appears to be local, but it's not, it's a scam.

We worship a God who doesn't try to deceive you, a God who hears, listens, and answers when we call. God doesn't use Caller ID like you, and I do, and think, "*Oh c'mon, her again? What now?*" God doesn't hear you praying and think, "*If I don't answer, maybe he'll stop and go do something else.*" The nice thing is God's number isn't private or unlisted. Spiritually speaking we want to have God's number in our Favorites or on Speed Dial. It should be perhaps our most frequently called number. Sometimes you call someone for a specific purpose, other times you may be "checking in." Sometimes you speak more than you listen, sometimes you listen more than you speak. The same is true when we call on God. Have you ever gotten a little tired because someone called you and he or she went on and on and your phone is kind enough to show you how many minutes or hours the conversation lasted? The good news is God never gets tired. You can talk to God for as long as you want and God's never going to get tired or say, "*I'm sorry this has been great, but I've got a universe to oversee, and I've got to go.*" God is older than rocks and has all the time you need and more than you can imagine.

One phone innovation that a friend shared she didn't like is "call waiting." She said, "Unless it's an emergency, putting "me" on hold to talk to someone else... that's tough." At least God doesn't screen calls and say, "*Nope, not talking to you.*" God wants to talk with you and is never too busy to talk with you. God also doesn't put us on hold for an eternity. The problem is more on our side. We don't want to or don't think to call God, or we think we're too busy to talk with God because we don't realize we can talk to God anytime, anywhere, whatever we're doing. Even when life seems to be chaotic, confusing, scary, or spinning out of control, we can call on God and God listens.

A nice thing when you call God in prayer is you don't have to go through an endless directory that says, "*Please listen closely, because our prompts have recently changed. If you want to talk with God Almighty, press one. If you wish to speak with the*

*Risen Christ, press two. If you want to talk with the Holy Spirit, press 3, for spiritual guidance, press 4, for comfort press 5...*

David begins 86 with the acknowledgment that he is poor, needy, and frightened to the point of fearing for his life. He's in trouble and he knows it. Can anyone relate to how he's feeling? When you feel that way, remember what God is like. David says,

**1. "You are my God"** – there is a personal relationship. God isn't an abstraction, a theological or philosophical idea, God is a reality to David. He is devoted to the Lord and trusts in God. God has given all of us an open invitation to a personal relationship through Jesus, have you accepted that invitation?

**2. God is gracious.** David believes God wants to help him just as God wants to help you. We'll hear more about this attribute of God in the weeks to come, but it is essential to remember that it is God's nature and desire to be gracious to you and to all that God has made.

**3. Be persistent in calling and crying out to God** – David's persistence is reflected in so many phrases: *to you do I cry all day long. Give ear, listen to my cry, in the day of my trouble I call on you.* If you want to get in shape, you understand you can't exercise for 3 minutes a day or one hour a week, it takes persistence and commitment. The same is true in prayer and our relationship with God.

**4. Believe that God will answer you** although not always in the way or in the timing that you might hope for or want. This takes faith in both the character and the power of God.

Have you ever lost power and couldn't charge your mobile phone? How did that make you feel? One of the last reasons to have a landline is when power is out and cell phones aren't working or the batteries run down and you can't charge them, a landline still gives you a way to communicate.

Calling on the Lord in prayer as David does in Psalm 86, the good news is that the power never goes out. There are no issues trying to "reach" God, anytime, anywhere. God can hear you now. What you must do is **believe God is there for you** and understand that God is gracious and wants to hear from you and help you. **Be persistent in calling.** When you want to reach someone, you don't try them once and if you don't get an answer, throw up your hands and say, *"I guess they're not there or they*

*don't care, I'm never trying to call him again."* If you want to reach someone, you persist. Faith isn't any different. As another Psalm says, *"I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies."*

My hope is that after this message, you'll never look at your phone the same way again, and that it will serve as a spiritual reminder to call God regularly believing God listens and answers when you call.

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. What early memories of a telephone do you have from when you were young?
2. What do you enjoy and appreciate about your phone? What do you not like or find frustrating about the phone?
3. Do you ever feel the need to call out to God in your distress? What sorts of situations, circumstances, or challenges motivate you to call out to God?
4. How have you experienced knowing or believing God hears and answers when you call?
5. In Psalm 86, David is reminding himself who God is by "telling God who God is" in his prayer. How does calling to mind the attributes and qualities of God help give you assurance and strengthen your faith?
6. What difference does the frequency and depth of your communication with people deepen your relationship them? How is that also true in our relationship with God? Why is being persistent in calling on God important for you?