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“Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9).

Because prayer is not a simple transaction but a process that takes place within a relationship, persistence is the secret of success. It is not wish fulfillment but an exercise in trust between friends.

The parable of the knock at midnight reveals a whole network of friends. The man knocking at his friend's door is there because a friend of his came unexpectedly to his own door. He must be hospitable, so he prevails with his neighbor, who understands his obligation despite the inconvenience of the hour and his own settled household.

The neighbor rises to share his bread because he is part of a web of hospitality he also can depend on in time of need. Love is often inconvenient, but we act as good neighbors because we belong to a beloved community that holds us all. Prayer reminds us that God has always given us what we need, and so we extend our relationship with a generous God to an expanding network of giving and receiving. We imitate God by being good neighbors to one another.

A “Knock at Midnight” is also the title of one of the first national sermons delivered in the mid-1950s by a young pastor, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., chiding white Christian churches for failing to respond to the plight of their black brothers and sisters seeking civil and voting rights. Comfortable behind closed doors, pastors rationalized it was too risky and too sudden to expect good Christians to take on

racism and segregated congregations just then. They were asleep when the knock came asking for the bread of justice.

A summons that comes at midnight, when darkness surrounds us, disturbs our comfort and pulls us into the unknown. Jesus made it the hour of power when disciples become neighbors and when prayers are always answered for those who persist in responding to anyone in need.

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