

Do you have “clout?” Do you know what “clout” is?

In the mid-20th century, Chicago writers coined the term “clout” to refer to political power and influence. This usage was probably taken from the baseball expression “What a clout!” which described a powerful hit.

It was solidified as part of Chicago-ese with the first Mayor Richard Daley. By the 1970s, “clout,” referring to influence, particularly political influence, had found wide national usage.

I felt like I had “clout” for maybe 5 minutes in 2017, when we were in DC and went to see then Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan. We were inviting him to come to the Grand Opening of our new building. We’ve known Paul since he was first elected to Congress. And I’d be a liar, if I didn’t admit that it does something to you when the Speaker of the House is walking down the hall and he says, “Hi Scott. Hi Jane.” We got a picture with him on the portico that probably everyone who came to see him (**picture**) also got.

They say *clout* is what makes politics tick. It’s what you have if you can call city hall and make a parking ticket disappear. Clout is what you have if you can get a private meeting with the governor. Famed Chicago newspaper columnist, Mike Royko (**picture**) said “clout” is what a Chicago police officer must have with a ward boss to get a promotion to sergeant. The ward boss might have enough clout with the mayor to get a sweetheart contract for his brother-in-law. And the mayor might have enough clout with the White House to get an extra \$10 million in pork barrel money for the city. That’s clout.

Most of us don’t have much clout. I know that I don’t. Go through the TSA on your next flight and you know very quickly how little clout you have. Yet, we all need some clout from time to time. Periodically, we all need friends in high places. Someone who can cut through the red tape and help us when we can’t help ourselves.

If you’re a believer, you have something much, much better than **Clout**. You have a great High Priest in heaven. Please turn to Hebrews 4:14-16 (p. 1003). These are some of the most precious verses in Scripture. If you haven’t already, I’d encourage you to memorize them. Over the years they’ve been such a source of encouragement to me. They remind us that Jesus is the friend in high places that we need.

All Christians struggle with two crucial areas that will make or break us in the Christian life: *endurance* in the midst of trials and *prayer*. Endurance and prayer are connected. A strong prayer life is essential to enduring trials. Hebrews 3:6 reminds us that endurance is a mark of genuine saving faith. Prayer is our supply line to God in the midst of the battle. His abundant, sustaining grace flows to us through prayer.

Because prayer is so vital, the enemy tries to sever that supply line. When we suffer, the enemy whispers to us, “God doesn’t care about you. He isn’t answering. Why waste your time praying?” It’s easy to get discouraged and quit praying, which cuts us off from the very help we need!

As we go through tough times, we have a hot line to heaven. We have **Clout**, spiritual clout. *What does it mean to have spiritual clout?*

1.Spiritual clout means that you have access to the right person. “*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*”

Most of us are at a disadvantage when we read this verse. We don’t have a clear picture of what a Jewish High Priest (**picture**) is. The main thing that we need to know is that the high priest was the number one person in the Old Testament religious system. There were various levels and orders of priests in Judaism, but only one high priest. His main job was to represent the nation of Israel on the Day of Atonement, (*Yom Kippur*). On that day he’d go behind the thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. There he’d offer the blood of a goat on the Mercy Seat that sat on top of the Ark of the Covenant. When the blood was offered in the way God prescribed, the sins of the people were *atoned* or covered for another year (Leviticus 16).

That system was never meant to last forever. Back then the high priest had to repeat the sacrifice year after year. When one high priest died, he was replaced by another who continued the yearly sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

But now that Jesus has come and died on the cross, the sacrificial system of the Old Testament has been abolished. Jesus became our great high priest who has passed through the heavens into the sanctuary of God. Though He’s invisible to us (just as the high priest in the Old Testament was invisible when he went behind the veil), Christ’s sacrifice never needs to be repeated. Through His death on the cross, Jesus made a complete and final atonement for all sin.

So, as our great High Priest, Jesus is the right person to hear our prayers. He’s entered the Holy of Holies in heaven. Because of the incarnation when He/God became a man, He understands our frail humanity, yet He’s God and is praying for us. Because He died for us, we have immediate access to God. He’s opened the way to God for us by His own sacrifice on the cross.

Let me paint a picture for you. If you've attended Grace very long, we're very up front that we aren't good people. We're all sinners and don't deserve heaven. We're only going to heaven because of the cross and God's grace.

But imagine for a moment that you're in God's court of divine justice, the very throne room of God where He's seated as Judge. You're the defendant. You enter the courtroom and take your seat. Before the trial even starts you know you're in trouble. You've broken God's law countless times. You're guilty and know it. Even worse, the Judge knows it.

Next, the prosecutor enters the court with a smug expression and stacks of evidence. His name is Satan and he's eager to throw the book at you. He approaches the bench and begins laying out the evidence. Those present in the courtroom gasp as your most secret sins are exposed. Revelation 12 says that Satan accuses us before God day and night. He's a vicious prosecutor who cries to God relentlessly that if God is truly just and holy, He must punish those who have such a list of sins. He rests his case, convinced he'll win.

But then your defense attorney enters the courtroom. He walks past the prosecutor, past the guilty sinner, and approaches the bench for the first time. And He brings forth His own evidence. *"For the court's consideration, exhibit A,"* and He places 3 large iron nails on the table. *"Exhibit B,"* and He presents a crown woven of thorns still stained with blood. Exhibit C is the crossbeam from an old wooden cross. Then in an unprecedented act, He removes His robe revealing numerous scars on His back and arms, proof of a severe beating. He points to holes in His hands and feet and references a wound in His chest where a spear was plunged into His heart. He says to the Judge, *"Yes, he's guilty, but his penalty has already been paid. I paid it all."* Then, Jesus takes his robe, walks over to you and drapes it over your shoulders and says, *"There is now no condemnation, for he/she is in Christ"* (Rom. 8:1). And the Judge throws down His gavel and says, *"This court finds the defendant innocent. He's declared righteous. This case is forever closed."*

A few pages over in Hebrews 10:12, it says that Jesus, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God. Under the Old Covenant there was a piece of furniture conspicuously missing from the Holy of Holies. Do you know what it was? A chair. There was nowhere to sit down. The High Priest was to do his duty and get out. His job was never done.

But Jesus, as our great High Priest finished His work and sat down. His work is finished. He's a permanent resident at the right hand of the throne of God. *"We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens."* Our great high priest is Jesus.

We're not good people, but we have a great high priest. If you've come to the cross and trusted Him as your personal Lord and Savior, He's your great high priest. And when one of His children is in need, He rises to His feet, standing to support those who are His.

This is why we endure or *"hold fast your confession,"* even in the midst of terrible trials or entangling sin. Please don't give up or run away. Look to Jesus, your great High Priest who stands for you.

2. Spiritual clout means that you have access to the right person with the right past. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* This problem of evil and suffering is undoubtedly the greatest theological challenge we face. It's the single biggest obstacle for spiritual seekers.

George Barna (**picture**), public-opinion pollster, conducted a national survey in which he asked a scientifically selected cross-section of adults: *"If you could ask God only one question and you knew He would give you an answer, what would you ask?"* The top response offered by those who said they had a question was: *"Why is there pain and suffering in the world?"*

Sometimes when we're in the middle of a tough time, well-meaning people will say, "I know what you're going through." That can be a cruel thing to say. How can you be sure that you know what someone else is "going through?"

But Jesus does know. Where is God in suffering? Where is God when we're in pain? When we're tempted to sin? God's answer is the Incarnation. He, Himself, entered into all the agony and bore all of the pain of this world. God's answer to the problem of suffering is that He came right down into it. God put Himself on the hook on the cross.

Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel (**picture**) shares of an experience he had while in Auschwitz. He told of a Jewish prisoner executed before the whole Death Camp. Guards forced them to watch the horrible execution. As the prisoner hung on the gallows kicking, panting, and struggling in the throes of death, refusing to die-an onlooker was overheard by Wiesel saying, "Where is God? Where is He now?" Wiesel said that from out of nowhere, a voice within him caused him to respond, "Right there on the gallows; where else?" Wiesel understood that in suffering, we're not alone. God has suffered with us.

Or, as John Stott (**picture**) said, *"I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while, I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the*

cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it, we boldly stamp another mark, the cross which symbolizes divine suffering. The cross of Christ...is God's only self-justification in such a world as ours."

Jesus is our sympathetic high priest. The writer of Hebrews uses a double negative, "we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses...." to emphasize this point. Jesus is sympathetic and understands our deepest feelings. We all need someone to sympathize with our problems and weaknesses without condemning us. Sometimes that's enough to get us through, just to know someone else understands what we're going through.

I read about a boy who noticed a sign, "Puppies for sale." He asked, "How much do you want for the pups, mister?" "\$25 son." The boy's face dropped. "Well, sir, could I see them anyway?" The man whistled and the mother dog came around the corner, followed by four cute puppies (**picture**), wagging their tails and yipping happily. Then, lagging behind, another puppy came around the corner, dragging one hind leg. "What's the matter with that one, sir?" the boy asked. "Well, son, that puppy is crippled. The vet took an X-ray and found that it doesn't have a hip socket. It will never be right." The man was surprised when the boy said, "That's the one I want. Could I pay you a little each week?" The owner replied, "But, son, you don't seem to understand. That pup will never be able to run or even walk right. He's going to be a cripple forever. Why would you want a pup like that?"

The boy reached down and pulled up his pant leg, revealing a brace. "I don't walk too good, either." Looking down at the puppy, the boy continued, "That puppy is going to need a lot of love and understanding. It's not easy being crippled!" And the man said, "You can have the puppy for free. I know you'll take good care of him."

That's a very limited illustration of our Savior's sympathy for our condition. Since He became a man and suffered all that we experience, He sympathizes with our weaknesses. He demonstrated His compassion many times during His earthly ministry. And His humanity was not diminished in any way when He ascended into heaven. We have a completely sympathetic high priest sitting and praying for us at the right hand of God! **We have clout!**

Jesus is our sinless high priest. He was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Remember that Jesus, after fasting and praying for 40 days was tempted by Satan himself. How encouraging it is to know that Jesus was tempted just as we are. He faced every kind of temptation that we can face.

Basically, every temptation falls into one of three categories: *the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life* (1 John 2:14-17). Jesus defeated the devil in those three areas. Where we fail, He succeeded. Where we give in, He stood strong. Where we collapse under pressure, Jesus obeyed His Father. He was tempted, yet never sinned by giving in.

This has enormous implications for us. Because Jesus was tempted and never gave in, we know that He's never surprised by anything we say or do. We give in too early so we never feel the full force of temptation. But Jesus let the waves of temptation rush over Him and stood like the Rock of Gibraltar. When we pray we don't have to worry that somehow we'll shock Him. He's heard and seen it all. We can go ahead and be totally honest with Him, even about our sin and failures. He knows about it even before we tell Him.

Jesus knows every type of temptation. He knows what it's like to be hungry, thirsty, and tired. He knows the agony of physical torture. He knows what it's like to be mocked, distrusted, maligned and betrayed by friends. From the start of Jesus' ministry to the end, Satan leveled all of his evil power and strategies to try to get Jesus to sin. But he never succeeded. Jesus always obeyed the Father. Jesus fully understands everything that we face.

3. Spiritual clout means that we go to the right place. "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Notice again that word "confidence." You and I are invited to come with confidence to the "throne of grace." Because of Jesus when we come before that throne, we'll never be turned away.

Many think of God's throne as similar to the principal's office in school. Maybe you remember what it was like to be called to the principal's office? Nothing good could happen behind that closed door. You were bound to get in some kind of trouble if you went in there. Some students went into the principal's office and just disappeared, never to be seen again. No one knows what happened to them.

That's how many think of God's throne. We have a vision of an angry God who is looking for a chance to hurl lightning bolts at us. It's not true. When we come to God in Jesus' name, He welcomes us. He knows who we are. He calls us by name... "My child," He says, "what can I do for you today?"

It's why we're to come with *confidence*. The word in the original means "with freedom of speech." When we come to God in prayer, we can pour out our hearts. We can talk to Him totally freely, like we can with no one else.

This passage makes it clear that we're welcome at this throne and answers **four questions: (1) Why draw near? (2) When should we draw near? (3) How should we draw near? And, (4) What can we expect when we draw near?**

Why draw near? Because we're weak and have there a sympathetic high priest. We don't come because we've got it together and need a little advice. We come because we're weak. Jesus didn't say, "Without Me, you can get along pretty well most of the time. Call if you need Me." He said, "*Without Me, you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). When we come to the throne of grace, He doesn't ridicule us for our weaknesses. He welcomes us as a Dad welcomes his child to his side to protect him from danger.

When should we draw near? Whenever we need help. We should come in a "time of need," which is at all times! We fail to pray because we don't realize how needy we are. We think we can handle things and only call on the Lord for big emergencies. But we depend on Him for every breath we take and for every meal we eat, even if we've got a month's supply of food in the freezer.

When do we draw near? In the "*nick of time.*" The great expositor, G. Campbell Morgan (**picture**) wrote, "*I am never tired of pointing out that the Greek phrase translated —in time of need is a colloquialism of which —in the nick of time is the exact equivalent. That we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the nick of time —grace just when and where I need it. You are attacked by temptation. At the moment of assault, you look to Him, and the grace is there to help in the nick of time.*" We must learn to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17) because we're constantly in over our heads. Prayer is the acknowledgement that our need isn't partial; it's total!

How should we draw near? We should draw near with absolute confidence in Jesus, our great high priest. It says, "*Let us draw near.*" *Us* means every believer, everyone who's trusted Christ as Savior.

There's never a bad time to come. He's never busy or rude. If there's anything that should indicate that we're Christians, it's that like Him we're gracious. Our confidence isn't in how good we are or in how well we can pray.

God in His grace overlooks our shortcomings and poor prayers just as a loving parent overlooks the mistakes in the sentences of a toddler. Even when we've sinned horribly, if we draw near to confess our sins, He will always clean us up, just like a parent carefully cleans up a muddied child.

What can we expect when we draw near? We always receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. What a wonderful promise! We won't be scolded for having a need or told that it's too trivial for such an important high priest to be troubled with. We'll receive mercy and find grace to help.

"*Help*" is a nautical term used elsewhere only in Acts 27:17 to describe the cables that the sailors wrapped around the hull of Paul's ship during the storm so that it wouldn't break apart. It has the nuance of running to the aid of someone crying for help. When your life is unraveling, cry out to Jesus, your sympathetic high priest. You'll receive mercy and find grace to help.

What is the difference between *mercy* and *grace*? They somewhat overlap. *Mercy* refers reference to God's tenderness in withholding that just punishment we deserve because of our sin and guilt. *Grace* refers to His undeserved favor. After He has freely forgiven our sins, which actually deserve His judgment, He blesses us.

Both words together reflect the good news that "*in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them*" (2 Cor. 5:19). All that trust in Christ's shed blood as the payment for their sins have free access at the throne of grace to God's boundless mercy and undeserved favor!

Conclusion: As believers, we can feel complete freedom to come into God's presence at any time. Pastor Ray Pritchard has a great illustration of this. He writes: *One of our sons helped me understand this years ago during an all-night prayer meeting. We set up the plan this way. During the night we began every hour with a brief devotional by a different person. During the hour assigned to me, I gave a brief devotional and then we spent the remainder of the hour in prayer. After I finished speaking, a friend said to me, "Did you see what Josh did?" Our oldest son was probably 5 years old at the time. "What did he do?" I hadn't noticed anything. My friend said, "While you were talking to us, Josh came up to you and asked a question. You stopped your talk, leaned over, and answered him. Then you finished your talk." I didn't even remember the incident because it happened so naturally. Because he was my son, Josh knew he could come to me any time, even when I was speaking, and I would not turn him away. That's the "boldness" and "freedom of speech" that all of us ought to have when we pray.*

What's the bottom line? We've got a friend in high places. We've got **Clout**. We've got connections in heaven. We've got a friend at the throne of grace who delights to answer our prayers. **Jesus is the Right Person with the Right Past in the Right Place.** Because He feels your pain, He can sympathize with what you're going through. Nothing you say will surprise him. Come boldly. Come often. Come to the throne of grace and pour out your heart to Him. You'll never be turned away. If you have needs, pray! Draw near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help. You and I have **Clout** in the courts of heaven because of Jesus!