



Matthew 7:7–11

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good

gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Reflection

One of the very special gifts contained within the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' teaching on prayer. Just think of what Jesus has taught us so far. He's warned us against the showy public prayers of the Jews, 'instead pray in private or if you are praying in public then pray with quiet reverence in your heart. You're praying to God, not for outward show.' And when you pray, don't heap up empty words like the pagans. God knows what you need before you ask it. Yet there is something so important in the act of prayer, it is such a reminder of our dependency on God, and

his gracious provision in our lives. There's something so powerful and essential about prayer that Jesus encourages us to pray as often as we can. And so at the heart at the heart of chapter 6 Jesus offers us his model of prayer, the Lord's prayer. We enjoyed the Lord's Prayer for more than a week and frankly we could have spent a month in its depths and riches. If you have a moment now why not flick back in your bibles, pause this talk, and read the Lord's Prayer again? It'll make for a great lead-in and counterpoint to today's passage.

And what a beautiful passage we have in front of us today. So beautiful and so important to our understanding of prayer. Could Jesus' words be more comforting? Listen to them again,

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Calvin loved these verses. He said of them ‘nothing is better adapted to excite us to prayer than a full conviction that we’ll be heard.’ Luther loved these verses as well.

He said of them 'He knows that we are timid and shy, that we feel unworthy and unfit to present our needs to God ... We think that God is so great and we are so tiny that we do not dare to pray ... That is why Christ wants to lure us away from such timid thoughts, to remove our doubts, and to have us go ahead confidently and boldly.

These verses have caught many people's imaginations, one commentator seeing in the repetition of 'ask, seek and knock' the picture of child asking if his mother is near, and seeking her if she is not around, and knocking if she is away in her room. It's a lovely picture of us as God's children, calling out to our Dad.

I'd like to make four quick comments on

what Jesus teaches us about prayer in these verses.

Firstly, do you notice that ‘ask, seek and knock’ are imperatives. They’re commands. Jesus is commanding us to pray to God. We’re to pray persistently, and even perhaps to pray with increasing intensity – first we ask, and then we seek and finally we knock. So firstly Jesus urges us to pray, regularly, persistently and with increasing intensity until we’re heard.

Secondly, feel the certainty and the universality of God’s response. The certainty in ‘it will be given,’ ‘you will find,’ ‘the door will be opened’ and the universality this is – true for all – ‘everyone who asks receives’ ‘the one who seeks finds’ ‘to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

‘Pray persistently, regularly and with increasing intensity and you will be heard (certainty), anyone (universal) who prays like this will have their prayers answered.

Thirdly, we again feel that same inestimable privilege that we felt in the Lord’s prayer at being able to address the God of the universe as our Father. This is driven home by Jesus’ parable in verses 9 to 11. Even we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our human sons, how much more will God who is in heaven, give good gifts to his precious children when they ask of him! Again we feel that unbreakable family bond, not that we have a responsibility to God, what child looks after their own Father, but that as his children we are his responsibility, it’s the Father-who knows our every need even before

we ask him, and it's his responsibility to give good gifts to us when we ask of him.

But finally, I'd also like to make the point that this all sounds really very easy. Just ask and you'll receive. Now in part, this is exactly what Jesus is saying, just ask, your Father answers prayers, often in greater ways than you can ever imagine, he delights in giving good gifts to his children. And it is extraordinary how hard busy modern Christians find it to pray and consequently how little many Christians pray – and so its right to feel the lightness and comfort and encouragement to prayer that this passage is meant to be. But in the same breath, while God always hears our prayers and answers them he only gives us what is according to his will. So when we ask, seek and knock – God

will respond, we'll find what he wants us to find and doors certainly will be opened to us but not always as we expect. A couple of verses summarise this well I think, James 4:2b says,

You do not have because you do not ask God.

But for the act of prayer we could have so much more. So pray, ask, seek and knock and your Heavenly Father won't disappoint. But equally, 1 John 5:14-15

14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked

of him.

And so to pray effectively and powerfully and with almost certainty of the outcome then we need to pray according to God's will which means putting in the hard work to discover God's will through meditation on the Scriptures.

Think

Which leads quite nicely into the part of our devotion where we take some time to think over our passage of Scripture. Take the time now to learn about prayer by meditating over this passage. Would you characterise your prayer life as persistent asking, seeking, knocking in step with God's revealed will in the Scripture? What does it mean that God delights in giving

good gifts to his children if only they'll ask for them? What could you have received from God in your life to date if you'd only just asked? What wonderful implications are contained in this most comforting passage! Think about them and then act on them.

Pray

And it almost goes without saying today – then pray. Perhaps pray the Lord's Prayer and then pray this passage of Scripture back to God. Claim its promises in your life today and go out into your day excited like Calvin was that your prayers will be heard.