

The Certainty of Prayer **Matthew 7:7-11**

Proposition: Be a person of prayer, because the God of heaven is your Father and He will answer.

Introduction

Mom's Caramel Rolls

How not to handle God's Word

What to do with God's instruction

Be a person of prayer, because the God of heaven is your Father and He will answer.

1. Pray persistently. (v. 7)

Jesus issues this command to pray using three verbs: Ask, Seek, and Knock. In order to understand this threefold command, we need to understand what makes these verbs similar and what makes them different. Let's start with how they are different. Think back to the opening illustration.

It was not my asking, driving home, or knocking on the door that made the caramel rolls. Neither did any of those things earn the rolls. The only reason I would be eating a caramel roll that night was that my mother was able to make them, and she loved me enough to do it. However, I was not without responsibility. If I had not asked for the rolls but driven home and knocked on the door expecting them, they would not have been there. Not because my mom couldn't make them, didn't love me enough to make them, or didn't know I wanted

them, but because I didn't ask. The same result would have occurred if I had asked but not sought or sought but not knocked.

I believe the same is true in our prayers lives. I think Jesus asks us to do all three of these things because he actually wants us to do all three of these things. He wants us to ask in prayer out of our need and God's sufficiency. He wants us to actively pursue the things we have asked for in prayer soaked, prayer lead, prayer powered action. He wants us to persist in knocking at the doorway to the throne of grace because we know that He Himself will answer. Each of these words speak to different dimensions of our prayer lives and we ought not neglect any of them.

Let's move on to how they are similar. Now, this is going to be a little technical for my liking, but the concept we are going to dig up is vital to understanding Jesus's command here, so bear with me. All three of the verbs are in the same case in the original language, and that case is used to denote continuous action rather than action in a single moment in time. For example, I could describe myself right now by saying, "I preach." It doesn't sound quite right, but it is not incorrect. However, it would be better if I used the continuous form of the verb and said, "I am preaching." So, when we read Ask, Seek, and Knock, a more complete translation might say, "Be asking, seeking, and knocking."

This distinction may seem to be a small issue, but it is actually vital to our understanding of the command issued. In the same way that my response to the command, "Move" would be different than, "Be moving," my response to the command, "Be asking, seeking, and knocking" is far different from my response to Ask, Seek, and Knock. This is not a command to set aside time and pray, it is a command to be praying. In other words, what Jesus has in mind here is not a

people who occasionally take time to pray, but a people of prayer.

Now, take this one step further with me and think about what this means about the position prayer holds in the Christian life. Often times, we view it as an added bonus of the gospel. We see it as a nice cup of coffee that will give us that little boost we need to make it through the day. But, Jesus didn't say, "Ask if you're out of options, seek if you don't know what else to do, and knock if you feel like it." He said, "Be asking, seeking, and knocking." Jesus didn't see prayer as the coffee of the human life, he saw it as the breath. As a human needs breath to perform all the other duties he has, so the Christian needs prayer. It is not the only thing we are called to, but without it everything else will lack its source of power. Christian, if you are ever to pray like Jesus did you must understand prayer as Jesus did, as the very breathe of your soul.

From this instruction on how to pray Jesus moves on to the reason why, and that is

2. Pray, because the result is certain. (v. 7-8)

At first glance, this appears to be a completely unqualified promise, or a blank check from God. However, thankfully, there are other similar prayer promises elsewhere in the New Testament that we can also consult. For example:

James 4:2b-3

You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

1 John 5:14-15

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

John 14:13-14

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

All of these verses promise the same certain result of prayer, but they all include a qualifier or a parameter. So why does this promise by Jesus not include some type of fencing qualifier?

I think the answer is that there is no need for it here. Jesus has just preached a whole sermon on righteousness and how it should be practiced. It has been harsh and set a higher standard than is humanly attainable. At this point, anyone whose heart is soft to the things of God is painfully aware of their insufficiency to live in the way Jesus has presented and desperate to find the help they need. And to those hearts Jesus says this, "Pray in Faith. Ask for those things which you know you need and cannot get. Seek the face of God tirelessly and desire more the righteousness you see. Knock at the door of the throne of grace with an insatiable hunger to be answered. Begin doing these things now and never stop. You will receive those things you need time after time after time. Your seeking will never be in vain and with each step of pursuit there will be a blessing of discovery. You will never be left forsaken on the doorstep of a door you are called to knock on."

Friends, this is a beautiful promise, among the most beautiful we have been given, but my heart rarely takes hold of it. My heart rarely prays with this kind of passion and boldness and faith. I don't pray like this promise is really true. And why is that?

I don't pray like this promise is true because I don't pray from the heart of need that this promise is addressed to. Often times I pray from a heart that thinks it has a Plan B. My heart thinks that it would be really nice if this promise was true, but if it's not I'll still be okay. Friends, that is a lie! There is no Plan B in the Christian life. Look at the structure of verse 8. What is required to be a receiver? To first be an asker. What must the person who desires to be a finder do? They must seek. What must I do to have this door opened? I must knock. Prayer is NOT the air conditioner in the vehicle of our lives, it is the engine. It is not peripheral, it is central. **So, we need this promise to be true.** If this promise is not true our faith is stalled out on the side of the road. **If this promise is not true Christianity can be counted as just another avenue to eventual disappointment.**

However, this promise is true. God never ever ever gives the cold shoulder to a desperate prayer of faith. So, the question we must ask ourselves is this: Do our prayers come from a heart of desperate need whose only hope is a faithful God? If they do not, we have missed the point of the Sermon on the Mount. But if they do, we can have rock solid, blessed assurance that they will be answered, and they will be answered with abundant blessing.

Jesus follows this promise of prayer with the reason why it is so unshakeable, and that is

3. Pray, because the God of heaven is your Father. (v. 9-11)

The promise of prayer is founded on two things. First, is the fact that God is God. This may seem elementary, but Jesus starts here, and I think he does it for a reason.

In the analogy he draws, he discusses the kindness of earthly fathers toward their sons in giving them the good gifts that they ask for. Then he draws a distinction between earthly fathers and God. And the words he uses are "evil" and "in heaven." Now, why did he compare the evil of man with God's heavenliness rather than his goodness?

I think it's because He was getting at more than God's goodness. He is pointing to the whole character of God and how different that is from the character of men. When men are temporary, God is eternal. When men are inclined toward sin, God is perfectly holy. When men are fickle and unreliable God is unshakably faithful. When men strive to gain control over each other, their situations, and their own actions, God is seated on his throne ruling all things with his sovereign hand. When men stand on the shores of the Pacific Ocean and cower at its harsh power, God looks down and speaks to each wave saying, "Thus far shall you come and no farther" (Job 38:11). God is more than good, he is Himself. And because of this he has the ability to answer each of your prayers.

The second pillar of the promise of prayer is this God's relationship to us. Because of the work of Christ, God doesn't relate to us as far off or otherly, but as a supremely loving, supremely caring Father. Not only does God have the ability to grant your requests, he longs to in his fatherly love. Not only is he supreme in his ability to give good gifts, he is supreme in

his desire to, and that changes everything. Jesus says it like this, Read Verse 11. The measure of God's goodness and generosity toward us as revealed in this statement of Jesus and accessible by prayer is simply unimaginable.

However, this was not always the case, was it. In our sin we were enemies of God and forsakers of his Beauty. This sonship or daughterhood that we now enjoy was bought at a lofty price, and that was the very life of Jesus. Jesus willingly laid down his position as the only Son of God and went to the cross to be temporarily forsaken by his heavenly father that we might be saved. **Ponder that, the Son died forsaken that the Forsakers might live as sons.** Then, he was raised from the dead and now he ushers us in to enjoy the rich blessings of the family of God. Our only responsibility is to recognize that gift as beautiful and to cling to it. In doing this our eternal position as God's children is secured and this promise for prayer becomes our own.

This spectacular gift and this spectacular God form the foundation of the promise of prayer given in the previous verses. The result of prayer is certain because God is our heavenly father, and that ought to be reflected in the way we pray. Each time we bank on this promise in our asking seeking and knocking we should kick this foundation to remind ourselves just how solid it is. Understanding the promise of prayer pushes us to pray but experiencing afresh the fortitude of its foundation will lead us to pray more boldly and more faithfully than ever before. This is why Jesus starts his framework of prayer with, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." This is why Paul begins his prayer for the Ephesians by praising God for his adopting love. This is why every single Psalm that includes a request grounds that request on the character of God and the way he relates to his people. Jesus grounds his prayer and the promise of prayer on

this foundation, all of the great saints through time have grounded their prayers on this foundation, and we would be wise to do the same.

Conclusion

The correct response to this text is no mystery: Pray. However, I feel that I would be remiss to give no guidance on what to pray for. So, I'm going to give a few guidelines on what to pray.

1. Pray God-centered.

I believe that there are two types of praying: God-centered praying and not-God-centered praying. God-centered praying wants what God wants while not-God-centered praying doesn't. As Christians, we should want to be God-centered prayers. In other words, we should want to want what God wants. And we should want this because we know that God's desires are perfect and ours are not.

2. Pray the Word

Psalm 145:18 says, "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." John 17:17 says, "Your Word is truth." If you want to pray great, bold, God-centered prayers that God loves to listen to and promises to answer, Pray the Word. Not only does the Bible give us concepts to pray, it gives us language to pray as well. Friends, the best thing you can do for your prayer life is to stop separating it from your time in the Word. Just as the disciples did when they approached Jesus, the Word become flesh, roll up to your Bible and say, "Lord, teach me to pray." (Luke 11:1)

3. Pray for more of God.

Luke 11:10-13 is the parallel passage to this one in the gospel of Luke and it ends like this:

13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

You see, friends, the most heavenly, joy-giving, change-producing, loving gift your Father gives is more of himself. All other good gifts that he grants are specially designed to make this one even more enjoyable. Just as my mom's caramel rolls point me back to my love for her, all of God's good gifts should point us back to our desire for and love for him. All the spiritual maturity God produces in us simply provides us with a clearer view and more intimate experience of him. All earthly blessing he showers on should remind us of his lovingkindness and fatherly affection. God longs to give us more of himself that we might enjoy him more, so this is always a proper prayer and it will always be answered.

So, children of the Lord, Pray. Pray because it is the breath of your Christian life. Pray because Jesus has commanded you to. Pray because God is God and he is your father. Pray because it is the greatest pleasure granted you as a Christian. Pray in your work and in your play and in your quiet times and in chaos. Pray, because God has redeemed you to be a man or a woman of prayer. Pray.