

## “ASK THE FATHER FOR GOOD GIFTS.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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**Text for the Sermon: Matthew 7:7-11**

### **Introduction.**

I recently heard about a person who doesn't ask God for things in prayer for himself. He feels that God has already given him so much that he shouldn't be asking for more. Jesus disagrees. In our text Jesus implores us to pray six times in six ways.

### **ASK – Ask, Seek, Knock.**

**Matthew 7:7** Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Jesus makes an incredible promise here, one that seems dangerously open-ended. Our first impression is this sounds like a blank check.

Can you imagine if a very rich person handed you a signed blank check and said fill in whatever amount you want? Is that what Jesus is saying here? Ask, seek, and knock, for anything and it will be given to you? Anything?

Jesus is no one's fool, and He is not given over to folly. God is not a blank check or a giant ATM machine. A discerning person who reads this text carefully can see *four guidelines* for the kind of prayer God answers.

*First*, the one who asks must have *God as a Father*. Only children have their Father's ear. Scoundrels, hypocrites, liars, idolaters, unrepentant sinners, and the like can't just stumble upon this verse and act like they just found a fat wallet on the sidewalk. You don't just walk into a stranger's house and ask for a handout. Behind Jesus' words a relationship is implied, a close family relationship, made possible by the blood of Jesus and faith in Him.

One of the most wonderful things about God is as our judge he acquits us of all our lawlessness and unrighteousness and then on top of that He does the unthinkable. He takes out adoption papers on our behalf, knowing full well what we were and all we had done, and says, "You are now my child, you may live in my house, and you have a share in all the inheritance. You are now my son, my daughter, ask of me whatever you need, and I will listen and answer."

Are you a sinner under the judgment of God or are you a redeemed child with God as your Father? Unrepentant sinners have a judge, repentant sinners have a Father.

Are you at home in the Father's house, in His presence? Are you comfortable talking to Him? Do you live with Him? Those who live in the Father's house have access to the Father. We don't just call Him Father, but we ask of Him things you would ask of a father.

**Second**, the words ask, seek and knock are all imperative, they are commands. Commands are meant to be *obeyed*. We are being told to do something here, something quite specific. And all three commands are in the present tense, which means ask and keep on asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and don't stop or give up.

Prayer presupposes and requires faith and obedience. The sovereign God of the universe, who does whatever He pleases, commands us to pray and ask. Scripture says we have not because we ask not. We go around with wishes, longings and hopes, our heads are full of thoughts and our hearts are full of worries and doubts, but we don't pray. When we don't pray, we aren't obeying, and so we don't have what we need. Are we living a life of faith and obedience?

**Asking** is the foundational rule of the Christian faith, the necessary duty of every Christian, the means by which God sends favor, blessing and help. No one is exempt from this rule, not even the Son of God Himself.

We should expect nothing from God if we have not asked. The work that is before us as a church is spiritual and it is utterly futile without spiritual help and strength and wisdom.

**Third**, the progression of commands from asking to seeking to knocking implies *persistence*, earnestness, time well spent pouring out the desires and requests of our hearts.

This is not just a quickly thrown up prayer. "God, I need a thousand dollars quick, and I don't have time to stop and chat, so just leave the cash. Thanks, bye." "Lord, I am in pain here, heal me quickly so I can get on with my life, I got lots I want to do."

We want fast service, fast food, fast oil changes, fast cash, and we want fast answers to prayer. If God gave only instant answers we would never grow up and grow in sanctification. Our spiritual lives would remain shallow. We will never know the heights of the Christian life without striving and pressing in, further up and further on.

An athlete pursuing victory is persistent in training and preparation. If he quits then it is evident he has given up the goal. Scripture says, don't grow weary in well doing and don't grow weary in well-praying, in well-asking.

Let me remind you the reason for persistence isn't that God is forgetful and must be reminded, or deaf and must be told more loudly, or reluctant and must be persuaded. The reason for earnestness is not about Him but about us. God is waiting for us to recognize our neediness, our beggarly condition and finally submit to Him and admit it out loud.

Persistence shows how well we understand our need and our dependence by earnestly entreating Him. In other words, the only people who pray like Jesus is commanding are people who clearly see their need and know apart from God's grace and help, they are without help or hope.

What does this kind of praying look like? What would this "ask, seek, knock" kind of conversation with our heavenly Father sound like?

The request may be casual at first or just a quick frantic prayer here and there. So God delays and lets the pressure build or the seriousness begin to move in on us. He wants to show us our hearts and to draw out our true desires. What do we want, and do we really want it? Are we clear about impact our need has in our lives and on our relationship with our Father?

*Fourth*, Jesus says in the last verse the answer to prayer depends on what kind of things we ask for. *Good things*. God gives good things to those who ask for good things.

In the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel Jesus is more specific.

**Luke 11:13** 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!

Those who seek the best things the Father has to offer will never be denied. And the Holy Spirit is the very best. The Holy Spirit is not the only good thing we should seek, but He is the highest and the best. The Holy Spirit is God with us and God in us. Praying for the Holy Spirit is praying for the presence of God in our life.

It's the Spirit who changes and transforms us and conforms us to the image and likeness of Jesus. It's the Spirit who cleanses us and removes our sin and guilt. It's the Spirit who gives us wisdom and guidance. It's the Spirit who fills us and empowers us and equips us and gives us endurance in tough times.

Go for the priceless treasures first. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Ask for salvation and you will be heard.

Ask for forgiveness and pardon and complete cleansing and you will be answered.

Seek for the Holy Spirit and you will find.

Knock persistently for wisdom, discernment, faith, love and peace and the door will be opened.

Do you ever get frustrated that you are not making more progress in grace or in defeating sin or in becoming more like the person God wants you to be? Do you get down on yourself when you slip back into old ways or old habits or patterns of doing things?

The lack of spiritual maturity or spiritual growth in our lives can be directly linked to our lack of asking and our insincerity and lack of earnestness when we do ask.

Are you willing to do the hard work of child-like, faithful, patient, persistent prayer? Are you willing to go after the very best things, the highest things, the most important things? And if none of these things interest you, are you willing to pray and ask God to make them matter to you?

Will you plead with God for the sake of your own soul and the souls of those closest to you, your spouse, your children, your church? Pray earnestly with eternity in mind.

Pray with passion, with specificity, with earnestness, with patience, all the way to old age.

*Jesus explains why prayer works and why we can have assurance it works.*

Jesus uses a human analogy. Just as a loving father will only give things that are beneficial and a blessing, so will God. Just as a loving father will not give bad things even if we beg, neither will God. Just as a loving father does not give his son absolutely everything he asks for, neither will God.

We can have complete confidence God will answer wisely and well, and only gives us what is best. The fatherly affection of our God gives us confidence, courage, and boldness.

## **Conclusion.**

Prayer is not a blank check and it's not automatic or instant. Come to God as child, knowing Him as your Father through His Son Jesus Christ. Come in faith and obedience asking, and not just asking but earnestly, persistently, diligently asking, seeking and knocking. And come asking for what is truly good and best, with complete trust and confidence our Father will do that.

Ask and ask again for every good promise mentioned and held out to you in Scripture. Ask your Father in heaven who delights to hear from you and who delights to give the earnest desires of your heart as you seek the good things the Father has to give.

## **Prayer:**

Jesus, teach us what to pray and how to pray. We are so inadequate, and we fall so far short. We ask too little and too infrequently. The Christian life you hold out to us is impossible without dependent, persistent prayer. Help us by your Holy Spirit. Father, help those who are still confused about prayer to seek you and to search your Scriptures. Holy Spirit, guide those who struggle and prod those who need a wake-up call. Father, thank you that you are the one true prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, and you only give good gifts. Help us to see your answers when they aren't what we asked for or wanted. And all of this we ask, believing in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.