

Ask, Seek, Knock, Open

Matthew 7:7-11

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I was watching Kirsten Charles feed her son George not long ago. She and Kevin are teaching him how to sign. It's amazing that children can learn how to sign before they can learn how to talk.

As early as six months of age, a child can ask for things by signing.

Last Christmas a video of a child having his first experience with Santa Claus went viral. As soon as his parents placed this very young child on Santa's lap, the child's eyes and face showed signs of fear and he began to give the sign for help.

One of the more common signs children learn is the sign for more. You place your thumb and your fingers together and then bump both hands together.

Asking is a way of life. It says, "I'm not self-sufficient. I need others to help me through this world." It says, "You have something I need or want."

Children become experts at asking. A child quickly learns who to ask and when to ask. It's an art form. A child knows if it's better to ask Mom or Dad. Grandparents are easy prey.

Children will usually ask until they hear the word "No." They know that one "no" doesn't always mean "no forever."

Children are not the best at policing themselves or being judges about limits.

We all know that children don't turn out very well if they always get what they ask for or never have to work for what they get.

Such children turn out spoiled and rotten, as some people say.

When it comes to our relationship with God, we also do a lot of asking when we pray.

Asking acknowledges that God has what we need or can provide what we cannot do for ourselves.

When we ask, we acknowledge God is powerful and able. We are expressing our faith in One beyond us, whose power is beyond our own, who is able to change situations with a simple command.

We know that asking is in keeping with the kind of prayer Jesus prayed and taught.

"Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass

against us.”

Jesus asked God for daily provisions and for the forgiveness of sins. He also asked God not to [lead him into temptation.]

People that are in need stand a better chance of being helped by someone they are in a relationship with, someone that knows them, someone that loves them, someone that wants what is best for them.

Jesus implies this when he asks, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?”

When we are in a loving relationship with someone, we want to give good things to each other, not things that are going to be harmful.

God wants to bless us with good things. God does not want to give us things that will harm us.

God wants us to trust Him.

God says that we know how to give good gifts to our children even though we have evil hearts. So how much more does God know how to give good gifts to us when we ask?

So what is the problem when we ask for things and we don't get them or even have bad things happen or come our way?

Part of our problem is that we are a lot like children. We don't like taking “no” for an answer.

We can't always know but here are some possibilities.

When we ask, God might say, “Have a little patience.”

If we were to move headstrong ahead and ignore God's answer, the pain of not waiting would become obvious.

As a child, we would never have had the patience to wait till Christmas Day to open gifts that were under the tree if we were not told we had to wait.

If the gift had our name on it, we would have opened it immediately if we had not been told to wait. By waiting we learned patience. By our waiting, the joy of an anticipated day grew and was shared with many members of our family when we opened our gifts. Waiting produced patience and joy.

When we ask, God might say, “Not now.”

God's timing is best. An eight-year-old would have a cell-phone if adults allowed it.

Fourteen-year-olds would be driving if we allowed it.

A lot of eighteen-year-olds would stop and purchase beer every weekend if it were allowed.

We see the value of waiting while they might not. God sees the value of waiting and we must trust Him to know this when we ask. God knows when there are dangers ahead. God can see suffering that we cannot see or know about.

God might say, “No. Not now.” God might also say, “No. Not ever.”

These may be the most difficult of God’s words to hear when we ask. We might hear these words when we discover there is no cure for a disease, that someone will never walk again, that someone is born with a birth defect, that you did not get the job.

Any time we lose something and the reality sets in that God didn’t step in and change that part of our world, we realize our prayers have not been answered as we had prayed.

In those times, perhaps we have to readjust our understanding of God and our world.

Jesus said that God is all about giving good things to us, as loving parents are all about giving goods things to their children.

James 1:19 says that every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

While every good gift is from above, Jesus never said that God will step in and shield us from everything negative, destructive, or challenging situation.

Even in the perfect world of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were faced with temptation. God did not shield them from the challenge of temptation.

Once they made a choice to disobey God, other negative and destructive forces entered their world, which God didn’t shield them from.

Our prayers are sometimes answered as we pray them. What God seems to be looking for from us is a spiritual maturity so that our prayers will be more than just words on the tips of our tongues. God wants our prayers to be put into action.

Jesus said, “He who seeks finds.”

While we are all dependent on God, God wants us to utilize every gift and resource available to us to care for ourselves and others. We are to be prayer seekers.

Just as a cancer researcher continues to seek a cure for cancer, God wants each of us to seek answers to our relationship problems, financial problems, emotional and physical problems. Ask, yes, but seek. Be a participant.

Don't just sit there when you can learn, read, do, explore, study, be discipled, and mentored. Don't just be passive when you can give, share, and love those around you. Ask, yes, but seek.

Try to understand your problem. Try to understand the situation you are in. Invite someone of knowledge and skill to walk alongside of you to give you advice and counsel.

Seeking advice is humbling. Only the arrogant moves forward without doing some seeking.

Is your marriage hitting a rough spot? Pray, yes. Why not seek advice?

You would seek advice if your truck were skipping and you didn't know how to fix it.

You would seek advice if you didn't know how to repair the plumbing in your house.

Why don't we seek advice when our relationships need repair?

Do you feel distant from God or the church because something happened to you that's made you cynical or angry? Pray, yes. Why not seek advice? You are not the first person that's been cynical or angry.

Ask. Seek. Then knock.

Knock means you have found a door and you need to knock and see if you get an answer. These verbs are in the continuous present -- keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.

I had friends in seminary who drove to Rogers City, Michigan from Louisville, Ky. every Friday and came back every Monday. They planted a church there near Lake Huron. My friend Timothy Sangster and I drove a bus from Georgia to Michigan and our youth groups from FBC Hartwell and FBC Royston conducted their first ever Vacation Bible School at the church.

The way Jeff and Melba started the church was by going from house to house knocking on doors and asking people if they would like to meet and start a Bible study. Soon they had enough people for a Bible study and it eventually grew into a church.

Jeff knocked on a lot of doors. He was persistent.

He was directed to the house of one man but he could never get the man to come to the door. He later discovered that the man was avoiding him.

Whenever Jeff went to his house and knocked on his door, the man went out the back door.

When Jeff found this out, he went to the man's front door and knocked and announced who he was and then ran around to the back door. He was standing there when the man came out. Jeff then shared the gospel with him.

Jeff and Melba are now missionaries in China. They are among the most prayerful and persistent people I know. They understand what it means to ask, seek, and knock.

Too many of us stop with asking.

Seeking is investigating. It is asking plus action.

Knocking is persistence. Knocking says, "I'm going to stand at the door until it opens or God leads me to another door. "

Knocking is perseverance. Knocking is not giving up.

Luke's gospel records this parable of Jesus:

18:1-3 Jesus told them a story showing that it was necessary for them to pray consistently and never quit. He said, "There was once a judge in some city who never gave God a thought and cared nothing for people. A widow in that city kept after him: 'My rights are being violated. Protect me!'

4-5 "He never gave her the time of day. But after this went on and on he said to himself, 'I care nothing what God thinks, even less what people think. But because this widow won't quit badgering me, I'd better do something and see that she gets justice—otherwise I'm going to end up beaten black-and-blue by her pounding.'"

6-8 Then the Master said, "Do you hear what that judge, corrupt as he is, is saying? So what makes you think God won't step in and work justice for his chosen people, who continue to cry out for help? Won't he stick up for them? I assure you, he will. He will not drag his feet. But how much of that kind of persistent faith will the Son of Man find on the earth when he returns?" Among other things, this parable teaches us to be persistent in our prayers. Keep knocking, specifically on behalf of others.

When we ask, seek, and knock, DOORS OPEN.

Could it be that we don't pray enough, seek enough, or knock enough because we are too satisfied and too complacent? Or do we not believe that doors will open? Are we too afraid of the changes God would make if doors were opened?

When doors open, God leads us into new places in our lives. It represents movement. It says that God doesn't want us sitting or staying the same. God wants us active. God wants us going.

Ministry is not for the spectator. Following Jesus is an action-oriented endeavor. If all we did was ask and God gave, our faith and our growth would be stunted.

We would be spoiled and rotten Christians.

The early church prayed. They were not afraid to ask. But they did much more. They knocked

on some doors. They were continually seeking God. Doors continued to be opened.

If that's the kind of church you want, if that's the kind of life you want, if that's the kind of faith you want, then I appeal to you, don't stop with asking.

Ask bold prayers of where God can use you in His ministry for the sake of others.

Pursue God at least as passionately as you do a hobby, a sports team, your job, or a relationship and see what happens.

Be persistent and don't give up. Keep knocking. Keep seeking.

God will notice. Doors will be opened.

It will change your life and this church.

Sermon Notes

True or False: God wants to give good things to those who love Him.

Why doesn't God always answer our prayers the way we want Him to?

- A. Sometimes God says _____. (Answer rhymes with "Gate.")
- B. Sometimes God says _____ . (God's timing is best.)
- C. Sometimes God might say N _ _ _ r.

James 1:19 says that every _____ and _____ gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

After we ask God, is our part over?

What should we do next?

Why is it important to be persistent in our praying?

The three ways to be persistent is prayer life is in our _____ing, _____ing, and _____ing.

This is how doors are opened.

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