

ESF Lord's day service message  
4/28/2019

### **Ask, Seek, Knock**

Matthew 7:7-11

*<sup>7</sup> "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*<sup>9</sup> "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup> 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!"*

There was a beer brewing company in a small town. In the town there were two churches. Members of both churches complained that the brewery house was giving the community a bad image. And to make matters worse the owner of the company was an outspoken atheist. He didn't believe in God one bit. The church people had tried unsuccessfully for years to shut down the brewery. Finally, they decided to hold a joint Saturday night prayer meeting. The church folks gathered on Saturday night and prayed to God that the brewery might be gone from the town. And that night the brewery was hit by a furious thunderstorm and lightening. It was burned to the ground.

The brewery owner called his insurance company and claimed the damages. But insurance adjusters promptly notified the owner that the insurance was not going to pay for the damages because the fire was an act of God and that was an exclusion to the policy.

The brewery owner was furious and he sued both churches claiming that they had conspired with God to destroy his business. But the churches denied that they had anything to do with the cause of the fire. The presiding judge opened the trial with these words: I find one thing in this cause most perplexing-we have a situation here where

the plaintiff, an atheist is professing his belief in the power of prayer, and the defendants all church members are denying it.

Do you believe in the power of prayer? Through prayer we can receive supernatural power from God. Through prayer we become strong and effective. If we do our works without prayer, we can do only what our power enables us to do. But when we do them through prayer, we can do what God's almighty power enables us to do.

In today's text, Jesus teaches us how to receive God's supernatural power through prayer.

### **Pray earnestly**

Jesus says that we have to ask, seek and knock when we pray. What Jesus means by "ask, seek, and knock" is to pray earnestly. Earnest prayer is simple but strong, deep- felt, desperate, and determined prayer.

The prayer God is pleased with listening to and answering is earnest prayer. Hebrews 11:6 says: *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

The brilliant scientist Sir Isaac Newton said that he could take his telescope and look millions and millions of miles into space. Then he added, "But when I lay it aside, go into my room, shut the door, and get down on my knees in earnest prayer, I see more of Heaven and feel closer to the Lord than if I were assisted by all the telescopes on earth."

Elijah was an ordinary man, but when he prayed earnestly, God used his prayer to perform miracles. James 5:17 says: *Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.*

When the apostle Peter was arrested, kept in prison and waiting for execution, the church could do nothing and had no power to rescue him.

They were desperate. So, when they prayed for Peter, they did not pray lukewarmly. They prayed earnestly: “*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him*” (Acts 12:5). God listened to their earnest prayer and miraculously rescued him from the prison (Acts 12:6-19).

When you pray earnestly, you cannot be lukewarm. When you pray earnestly you do not just pray through your mouths, but with your whole being. When you pray earnestly, you pour out your highest thoughts and deepest feelings to God and you surrender your will to God.

When you pray earnestly you do not just talk to God, but also you do whatever you can do. Think about the meaning of “ask, seek and knock” in prayer. “Seeking and knocking” are actions. To seek and knock you have to stand up, move and act with a clear goal.

If you are asking God for a job, you have to seek and knock to find that job. Just asking God for a job without doing anything is not earnest prayer. If you are asking God for peace in your relationship with others, you have to take action to reconcile with them. Just asking God for reconciliation without doing anything is not earnest prayer. If you are praying to God for health, you must do everything you can do to take care of your health- stop overeating, quit eating junk food, develop a habit of healthy eating, taking regular exercise, sleeping properly etc.

If you are praying to God to bless you financially, you have to take action and trust him in money matters. You must obey God’s financial instructions. You must use your money to serve and honor God before you use it for yourself. If you are praying to God for your spiritual growth, you must invest your time, effort and resources into spiritual matters. That is earnest prayer which is not only asking but also seeking and knocking.

Are you facing an impossible situation now? Do you need supernatural power to overcome it? Pray earnestly. While you are asking, do everything you can do, do whatever you can do, and do your best. God will listen to your prayer and answer your prayer.

### **Pray persistently**

The words “ask, seek, knock” are present imperative command in the original Greek text. They mean continuous actions. So, they can be translated into “*keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking.*” It means to continue praying without halting, despite difficulties or setbacks. It means persistent prayer.

Why then, do we have to pray persistently? Because God’s answer to our prayers may take longer than we expect. In addition God tests our faith by delaying answers to our prayers.

You may have prayed to God for something for a long time but haven’t received an answer to the prayer. Then, you may think that your prayers have gone unanswered. You may be tempted to quit praying. But here, the Lord is assuring you that He never ignores your prayer. He just delays answering your prayer with your best interest in mind. God’s delay of answering your prayer is not denial. Keep remembering this truth and pray persistently.

Jesus teaches this truth through the story of a poor widow in Luke 18:1-8 *then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.*

*"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she will see that they get justice, and quickly...."*

It has been said that George Muller began praying for 5 of his friends. He prayed 5 years before the first one was converted; for the next one he prayed 10 years; for the third one 25 years; for the fourth nearly 50 years. The last one was converted after 52 years, at George Muller's funeral. George Muller was the man of persistent prayer. He prayed persistently even unto death.

Some years ago, I read an interesting phrase in a fortune cookie in a Chinese restaurant. The phrase said: *To those who wait, a moment seems like years.* When you pray earnestly and wait for God's answer, you may feel that a day is like a year. But to God a thousand years can be a day (2 Peter 3:8). God is in control of time. He knows the best time to answer your prayer. So just be patient and persistent with your prayer. And you will surely see the day God answers your prayer.

### **Pray confidently**

Prayer which receives God's answer is confident prayer. God listens to our prayer when we pray with confidence that God surely answers our prayers. James 1:6-7 says, *"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord."* How can we have confidence that God surely answers our prayers?

First, we must trust that God is our Heavenly Father who gives us the best.

There is no earthly father who will give a snake when his child asks for a fish, or will give a stone when his child ask for bread. A father will not always give the very thing which his child asks, but he will seek the welfare of the child, and will give what he thinks is the best for the child.

God is far better than our earthly fathers. He will never give anything bad or harmful to us. He will always give us something better than what we ask for.

Paul asked the Lord to remove the thorn in his flesh. But the Lord did not answer his prayer as he asked. Instead, the Lord told him that His grace is sufficient for him (2 Cor. 12:7-9). So what we always have to remember in prayer is that God is our merciful heavenly Father and He will answer to our prayers in His own mercy and goodness.

We have to pray with confidence that God hears our prayers as our heavenly Father. As the heavenly Father, He always knows what is good for us and always gives the best for us.

Second, we need to maintain an intimate relationship with God.

There is a story of prayer by a fisherman. A fisherman who was out of fellowship with the Lord was at sea with his godless companions. Then a storm came up and threatened to sink their ship. His friends begged him to pray; but he demurred, saying, "It's been a long time since I've done that or even entered a church." At their insistence, however, he finally cried out, "O Lord, I haven't asked anything of You in 15 years, and if You help us now and bring us safely to land, I promise I won't bother You again for another 15 years!"

Why did he pray without confidence? Because he did not have an intimate relationship with God. When we have an intimate relationship with God, we can pray to Him with confidence.

How can we have intimate relationship with God so that we can pray with confidence? 1 Peter 3: 12 says, “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*” When we are righteous, we can pray with confidence that God will listen to our prayers. Being righteous does not mean that we are sinless or good by our own effort. It means to be forgiven and accepted by God by believing in the blood of Jesus. If we believe that through Jesus’s blood, we can have right relationship with God. And we can pray confident prayer that God will listen to our prayers. Although you have sinned, although you have been a terrible person, you still can pray confidently now if you believe in Jesus’ blood through which God accepts you as His child.

Third, we have to check the motives of our prayers.

When we pray according to God’s will, we can be confident of His answer to our prayers.

James 4:3 says, *when you ask you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

1John 5:14 says: *this is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*

Hudson Taylor started China Inland Mission in 1865. He faithfully served the mission field in China for 51 years. From the beginning he served the mission field by completely trusting in God to supply all his needs. Of course, from time to time, he struggled with shortages of finance and mission partners, cultural barriers, his own weaknesses etc. But he realized that he always could pray with confidence if he followed God’s will. He confessed, “*I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize the Lord is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine.*”

While you are praying earnestly and persistently for something, ask yourself why you are praying for it. Are you praying to follow God's will? Which word of God can justify that you are praying according to God's will?

If you are sure that you are praying according to God's will, be confident that God listens to your prayer.