



Saint John United Methodist Church
12700 W. Hwy. 42, Prospect, KY 40059
stjohnky.com

Message for August 2, 2020
“From the Mount: Ask, Seek, Knock”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Matthew 7:7-12

This morning let's hear one of the great promises of our Lord regarding prayer. We find that promise in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:7-12.

Matthew 7:7-12

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 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! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

What Have You Prayed For

Look back at some of the things you have prayed for. What have been those circumstances and people you've prayed for? What requests have you lifted up for yourself?

I have prayed for homes to sell, pregnancies to go well, churches to prosper, and, presently, for this Covid-19 Pandemic to pass. I pray for God's help all the time. *“Lord, please help me”* is a constant prayer.

The Faithfulness of God

In regard to our praying, all of us have struggled with answers that seem to be slow in coming. We ask ourselves, *“Does God even hear my prayers and, if he does, does he answer?”*

We pray and pray and nothing seems to come. Jesus encourages us to stay at it.

I have always said and do so believe that *“God always answers our prayers and does so in his perfection.”* He is faithful in every way.

William Barclay reminds us that when we pray we need to remember:

- *The love of God that wants the best.*
- *The wisdom of God that knows the best.*
- *And the power of God that can accomplish anything.*

Bill Hybels reminds us when it comes to praying:

- *If the request is wrong, God says, "No."*
- *If the timing is wrong, God says, "Slow."*
- *If you are wrong, God says, "Grow."*
- *But if the request is right, the timing is right, and you are right, God says, "Go."*

Aligning Ourselves with the Will of God

For me, a long season of praying for something puts me to growing. I have on many occasions started a season of prayer by praying for one thing, only to end up praying for something else. I realize in that that God has been at work. In the mix of my prayers God goes to work fashioning my prayers so they are more aligned with his will. What God really does is fashion my heart.

In John 14:14 Jesus boldly states, *"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."* It's the *"in my name"* part that's key. Asking for something in the name of Jesus is more about getting ourselves in sync with what God wants instead of what we want.

E. Stanley Jones writes that our prayers should ultimately draw us closer to the will of God. He asks, *"If I throw out a boathook from a boat and catch hold of the shore and begin to pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore?"*

"Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but aligning my will to his."

Stay Persistent

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls on us to stay at it when it comes to praying. *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

Jesus speaks here in the imperative. He is telling us to pray and to stay at it.

- Ask, and keep on asking.
- Seek, and keep on seeking.
- Knock, and keep on knocking.

Whatever you do, don't give up on God; don't quit praying.

A few weeks ago we had our granddaughters from Nashville to stay with us for a week. Henry and Owen were with us most of the week as well. We had a wonderful time. Both Cheryl and I were a good kind of tired at the end.

I had forgotten how persistent kids can be when they want something. They will ask and ask again. If you move to another part of the house they will seek you out. Even if you attempt to get away by closing a door, they'll just knock away until you tend to their needs.

Our Heavenly Father is much more attentive.

In Luke 11:5ff, Jesus talks about a man who came to a friend's house in the middle of the night asking for a loaf of bread.

Awakened from a sound sleep the friend understandably refused. The man would not be denied. He continued to call out to his friend. Eventually, the friend got up and gave him the bread. In Christ's mind, it was not the friendship, but the man's persistence that made the difference.

In Luke 18:1-8, Jesus tells another story of like kind about a widow who persistently called on a judge to render a verdict in her favor. Because of the woman's dogged persistence the judge did just that.

The word used here in some versions is "*importunity*." It's a word we don't use much these days. It means to press your point with a sort of troublesome persistence. Jesus wants us to stay at our praying.

Asking

"Ask and it will be given to you: seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

James 4:2 reminds us, *"You don't have, because you don't ask."*

God is all about meeting our needs, we simply need to ask, and in asking, we realize the source of *"every good and perfect gift."*

Notice I said, God is all about meeting our needs. God is not some divine Santa Claus.

When it comes to prayer we all too often skew the line between needs and wants. As I mentioned just moment ago, I've found that when I stay at my prayers they have a way of turning. While I might start out asking for A, I end up asking for B, because I know that's the very thing God knows I need.

As I said earlier, when I pray God goes to work fashioning my prayers so they are more aligned with his will. Staying at my prayers what I want takes a backseat to what God wants.

"Is there anyone among you," asks Jesus, "who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"

So let's go ahead and ask away, and look forward with great expectation to what God has in store. As Billy Graham once said, *"Heaven is full of answers to prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask."*

Seeking

*"Ask and it will be given to you: **seek** and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

There is a certain progression to what Jesus teaches here.

When you ask, you know what you are asking for. When you seek, you're not always so sure.

Paul talks about that sort of thing in Romans 8:26-27. He writes, *“The Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit makes intercession for us according to the will of God.”*

It’s one thing to ask, it is another to seek as if your very life depends upon the search. I have talked with numbers of people down through the years who have really struggled to pray. I always encourage them to seek, and in seeking I encourage them about finding what they are looking for.

When we seek, we make an earnest search to find out what God wants.

Christ’s promise is this, if we *“seek,”* we will *“find,”* and in finding we will share in riches beyond compare, and I not talking about money here.

Paul puts it well when he writes in Ephesians 4:17-19: *“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

May that be for every one of us.

Knocking

*“Ask and it will be given to you: seek and you shall find; **knock** and the door will be opened to you.”*

Cutting much deeper, Jesus talks also about knocking and by knocking the door will be opened. Knocking not only involves asking and seeking, but going to a specific place and knocking on a specific door to find a specific answer.

Just recently, I put in a new door handle for our front door. Everyone was having trouble opening the door, including myself. The old handle had simply worn out. You always had to knock for someone to come and open from the inside. It was really quite frustrating.

During those times when we feel as though God is locked behind a door that leaves us on the outside looking in, we are called to knock away. Know full well that God is just behind the door and ready to receive us.

We all have been amused down through the years at Sheldon Cooper on *The Big Bang Theory* when he knocks on Penny’s door. He always knocks and calls her name. *“Penny, Penny, Penny.”*

God does not want us on the other side of the door. He longs for us to be with him on the inside where there is love and fellowship. The call of God’s Son bids us to knock away for in knocking the door will open and God bids us to come in.

Knocking takes faith and for that matter so does crossing the threshold. Being received by God though is well worth it.

Called to a Season of Prayer

So let me challenge you about making a practice of asking, seeking, and knocking. Let's be persistent making requests, dutiful in our search, and faithful as we knock.

By so doing, we will:

- Share in the wonderful blessings of God.
- Find what we are ultimately looking for.
- And experience the deep riches of relationship with him.

Let me encourage you then to enter into a season of prayer. I can think of no better time than the one in which we find ourselves than right now. The persistence of the Covid-19 Pandemic has caused us all to be a more than a little weary. Let's meet that persistence with a persistence of our own. Let's meet it with a season of prayer.

Let me challenge you to set aside fifteen minutes a day for prayer. If you are already doing that, why not go ahead and add fifteen minutes to what you are already doing?

Let me suggest this outline for your prayers:

- Find a quiet place each day where you are unlikely to be interrupted. Read a few verses of scripture.
- Close your eyes and give thanks for three blessings in your life.
- Ask God to forgive you where you have failed him.
- Ask God to give you the strength to forgive others who have failed you.
- Ask God for help with those things that weigh you down. Be sure to name them.
- Ask God to help you reach out to a person you have a hard time loving.
- Ask God to help you reach out to at least one person with whom you can share God's love in word or deed.
- Ask God for a 24-hour supply of his Holy Spirit so that his power and wisdom will fill you.
- Finally, conclude by listening to what God has to say.