

Sermon August 8/9, 2020. Ask. Seek. Knock.

Hello Church, if you don't know me, my name is Elliott Morris. I am currently heading into my second year at Prairie Bible College and have also had the privilege of being an intern here at the church this summer. And let me just say this, there is not one dull moment here when you're working alongside Pastor Dan and Spencer.

Now, for those of you that do know me, you know that Bible camp has been a huge part of my life. I have countless memories from my summers as both a camper and a volunteer.

From singing fun songs, cooking tin foil dinners on the coals of a campfire and getting thrown off a tube, to getting two hours of sleep and cleaning up puke off of the floor, Bible Camp has quite a lot of different experiences to offer. But nothing is cooler than seeing God at work at camp in the big and the small ways.

Two summers ago, sometime in July, on the morning of a new week of camp starting, I received news that my Grandma had passed away. Now, this was the time of the summer when all the leaders started to feel a bit burnt out, myself included, and with this hard news on top of that, I showed up at camp feeling pretty out of it.

I remember sitting in the summer team pre-week meeting feeling so off, not knowing how I was going to get through this week while being completely there and giving 100% to my campers.

Once I had gotten back to my cabin to prepare for the week I knew my best option was to give this all to God in prayer as there wasn't really much else I could do! Now I don't remember exactly what I prayed but I do know it was a cry out to God to bless me with a great week, and for the strength to not just get through it but enjoy it.

Today we are reading from Matthew 7:7-11. Wherever you are, if you could please stand with me as we read. Here now the word of the LORD:

"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!"

Jesus' followers are purposeful in prayer and ask for big things according to God's perfect will.

This passage is part of the well-known sermon on the mount, which is the first of Jesus' five major discourses that we see in Matthew. It is also right near the end of the sermon on the mount too, so we know that Jesus has already taught about the Beatitudes, the Lord's prayer, and quite a few other foundational teachings. In this sermon, Jesus breaks down the challenging but practical way that His followers are expected to live.

Looking back at our passage, at a quick read through, these verses - at least the first two seem pretty straight forward. Ask God for things and we will get them. Right? Looking at it that way makes this whole prayer thing seem pretty easy. But, that would be missing the point.

Of course God wants to provide for us, and will provide for us, but these verses are saying far more than just that. Jesus is telling us how to pray and ask for things.

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In verses 7 and 8 we see these three ideas; Ask, Seek, and Knock. Let's break these down.

The ASK is coming humbly to God in prayer and asking for something while being aware of the needs you may have. So no, I don't see this verse justifying us asking for a sports car, the new PS5 or those fancy Blundstone boots that almost every worship leader / camp volunteer has... except me! Oh well.

So, unless you can somehow possibly think of a situation where those things would be a need, let's please just all agree that those are probablyyyy things we could all live without. But when it comes to things that you need or someone you know needs, God wants to hear those things!!!

The SEEK is Jesus explaining that we need to be putting our prayer into action, and be actively pursuing God's will. For example: If I was asking God for some work this summer but never got off of my butt to apply anywhere, who here thinks I would have a great chance of getting hired somewhere??..... Ya probably not too high. I would need to get up and go drop off resumes at some companies and be asking God to work one of those jobs out!

I have heard a lot of different metaphors about God and about how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. Some are good, but some not so much. For example I've heard that if our lives were compared to a car, God would be the driver and we would be the passenger because God has a plan for our life. Sort of like that song "Jesus Take The Wheel"

I don't think it works that way though. If we were to keep going with the car metaphors, I would say God works more as the navigation system. The Holy Spirit will give us guidance and help show us the right way but we won't go anywhere unless we push the gas pedal! We also have free will to choose different routes, and also stray off course!

I'll leave it at that though because there are always holes to be poked in metaphors!

Finally, the KNOCK is the act of perseverance. Jesus is telling his followers that just simply praying and maybe "seeking" after that prayer once or twice and then giving up after hearing nothing is not enough. Now, of course, God could answer a prayer instantly!

For example, earlier this summer, I messaged my friend to say I'm available to help with any wedding planning, and she told me she had just finished praying and had asked God to help her plan the wedding! That was a cool way of seeing God's provision, even though it was in a somewhat small way.

What happens if God doesn't give you an answer though?

God can take months or even years to answer prayers. And sometimes we won't ever get an answer to a prayer and God will use that silence to speak! In a way silence can be an answer.

Regardless of how or when the prayer gets answered though, we need to be certain of one thing: God knows what is best for us and will equip us with what we need! He follows through, but we need to trust.

An interesting thing about these three terms Jesus mentions is that they are all written in a continuous tense. It isn't just Ask, Seek, Knock, it is KEEP asking, KEEP seeking, KEEP knocking!! So the knock aspect is emphasized even more. We need to be asking, seeking, and knocking.

SO one thing we also need to remember when reading through this is that when Jesus says "everyone who asks receives, the one seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" It doesn't mean we can and will get whatever we ask for. He is saying these things assuming that his followers will be asking for good gifts already and as he already taught only a few verses back in Matthew 6:10 in the Lord's prayer. "Your kingdom come, and your will be done"

Now I want to focus on the other half of the passage. I'm going to be honest, I don't know how many times I have read through this passage but when I started preparing for this sermon I realized that I had never really taken the time to properly understand verses 9 to 11!

I was always confused by the sudden switch from Jesus telling his followers that they can ask and receive things to suddenly talking about bread and serpents! Maybe some of you have been in a place like that too.

What we see though is Jesus further explaining his point about prayer, by asking a rather rhetorical question to those listening. Now I just love when Jesus gets almost “sassy” in a way, by asking such an obvious question. I know all of us don't have children but if your friend, or someone you are close to asked for some food you wouldn't give them a rock. That would be absurd!

So, If we, a bunch of broken sinners can give people we love good gifts, then how well do you think God OUR CREATOR can care for us?! God knows our every need we have and will provide. So Jesus' point is this: God wants to give his people good things!

We see this idea in James 1:5-8 “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

God will give generously according to your needs, but don't just pray to go through the motions. The second portion of these verses also calls us to believe in what you are praying. If you are praying for healing in someone's life, are you praying in complete faith that God ACTUALLY CAN heal?

Church, we need to be people who pray in faith, knowing we are talking to the almighty creator of the universe. So ask yourself this... do you believe in what you're praying for? Or do you doubt?

I find that too often in my life, and maybe you guys can relate to this, I get stuck in this habit of only praying for regular things such as the weather or for myself or a friend to have a good day or good summer, with the occasional prayer for the sickness of someone close, or something else like that.

This is not bad necessarily, but Jesus tells us to be continuously Asking, Seeking, and Knocking, and yet I find myself a lot of the time fitting into more of the “Ask once and maybe seek once and awhile” category, and it's SO EASY to get comfy there!!

Through a quick google search I found out that there are 650 prayers in the bible, now I'm not sure if this is an exact or not but let's roll with it.¹ And believe it or not, in that total of 650 I was able to find some great examples of believers that prayed some BIG prayers, and I mean BIG.

¹ <https://lifecoach4god.life/tag/how-many-prayers-are-mentioned-in-the-bible/>

In Genesis chapter 18 Abraham pleads to God not to destroy the city of Sodom, despite the wickedness of its citizens. If you aren't familiar with this story, there is this city called Sodom that is NOT making some good choices and God plans on wiping them out, but Abraham asks God to spare them if He can find at least 50 righteous people. Abraham ends up getting down to asking God to spare the city if there is even ONE righteous person. You'll have to read that chapter yourself to find out how it ends up for Sodom but it's not great.

in Exodus 32, Moses asks God to show mercy on the Israelites after their repeated stubbornness and essentially "Changes God's mind"! Moses had been up on Mount Sinai getting the Ten Commandments and a bunch of other instructions from God and in his absence the Israelites decided to fashion an idol in the shape of a golden calf to worship. This of course is upsetting to God so He tells Moses to go so He can destroy them, but Moses tells God not to show anger and reminds Him of the promises he made to Abraham.. And then GOD does that!!! That just seems so crazy to me!

Later on, in 1 Samuel chapter one, a woman named Hannah who had been unable to give birth to any children prays boldly for a son and later gives birth to Samuel who becomes an important prophet, that later anoints David as the King of Israel.

In first Kings chapter 18, the prophet Elijah calls down fire onto an altar that was soaked with water. This demonstrated God's power and also defeated the prophets of a false God called Baal.

I'm sure many of you have heard or read through the story of the Fiery furnace in Daniel 3. Or maybe you have watched the Veggie Tales version that somehow involves a chocolate bunny factory... In the bible though, we see Shadrach, Meesach, and Abednego - and yes his name AbeDNEGO not AbeNDEGO, maybe it is just me but I grew up totally thinking it was AbeNDEGO. AbeDNEGO still sounds weird to me.

Anyways, Those three guys had a ton of faith. Although the text doesn't actually record them praying, it is what they say to King Nebuchadnezzar that sticks out to me. When they are asked who will save them from the furnace, they answered in verses 17 and 18 "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king that we will not bow down and worship your idol."

Our God CAN, and He WILL, but if not, I will PRAISE Him all the same.

When we pray, we need to have the same trust and faith that those three guys had, even when they were face to face with death. How powerful would it be to pray for something with that sort of trust, knowing God can answer your prayer, he will, but if he doesn't that he is still sovereign and has good plans for you!!

Would praying like that change the way you pray?

The last example I wanted to share is Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest. It starts in Matthew 26 verse 39, and reads:

'Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. '

Jesus gives us such a great example of a bold prayer. This only took place over an evening, but Jesus was knocking and asking again and again. Even though He knew what he had to do he still prayed, crying out to God asking if there was any other way, but acknowledging God's sovereign and perfect will.

These stories are amazing and we get to see incredible faith through these believers, but one of the coolest things about all these prayers is that because they prayed, they all got to see God at work. When we pray, we get to see God at work.

If you are maybe struggling in your faith right now, or just aren't seeing God in your life, maybe it is because you aren't praying for things enough or at all!!

If you are stuck in that place of not praying super often or asking Jesus to show up in big ways in your life, chances are you will be fine and could just continue on through life. But the thing is: You will be missing out in the beautiful gift that seeing God at work in your life truly is.

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So, do you want to see Jesus at work in your life?

Shortly after I prayed in my cabin for the strength to get through that week of camp, my first camper walked in, and it just so happened to be a kid I grew up on the same street with, basically a little brother to me. He was followed by three other boys that I knew pretty well, one of them being my good friend's little brother!

I remember feeling this sense of peace and calmness from God and the doubts and worries I had before seemed insignificant. That turned out to be one of my favourite weeks of the whole summer. I had a great time just hanging out with my campers, and teaching them about Jesus.

It was probably around half way through the week when I fully realized “Wow! What an incredible answer to prayer, I am so blessed!”

Looking back now, if I hadn't prayed, would my cabin still have been awesome and would my week have been great? Most likely yes. My cabin would have been the same and I would've had a good time. BUT I wouldn't have seen God's almost immediate answer to my prayer, it would have just been a good week.

So, do you guys want to see Jesus at work?

What is the first thing you do in the morning? Do you pick up your phone and scroll through instagram? Maybe you only wake up in time to throw some clothes on and head to work!

Whatever your morning looks like or even just your day in general, I want to challenge you to open up your bible rather than instagram, facebook or whatever else, and spend even just five or 10 minutes in prayer, and in the word.

The Youversion bible app has tonsssss of devotionals that are literally at your fingertips! Maybe you're more artistic or visual, so go to the dollar store, pick out a notebook and journal your prayers and devotions!

Friends, I want to encourage you to find something that works for you, and spend some time with Jesus. Don't get stuck in a rut of just praying sometimes or reading the bible when you have a few spare minutes.

Let's be people who are seeking after Jesus, and abiding in Him. God cares about you all so much, and wants a relationship with you. Let's pray.