

Ask! Seek! Knock!
Sermon on Matthew 7:7-12
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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The Bible encourages us: *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.* So, let's be sure to pray! Amen.

God's Word to us on what we like to call Prayer Sunday is Matthew, chapter seven, verses seven through twelve. Jesus says:

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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

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? 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Introduction: It's a Shame Not to Make Use of Good Help...

Dear fellow Christians—whom God earnestly encourages to pray:

Has this ever happened to you? It's Saturday morning. You're working on a project in your basement or in your garage. It ends up being a bigger project than you expected. All you've got is a hand tool to do the project. And you know that what you need is a power tool. So finally, despite the cost in time and money, you drive on over to the hardware store to buy the new tool. And you end up glad you did!

We like our handy gadgets. And we use them. I mean: ladies, let's say you spent years baking with a little set of mixing spoons. But then, you get a nice, big mixer as a gift. The next time you bake, you use the mixer. You'd be foolish not to do so!

Theme: Ask! Seek! Knock!

But I'm thinking that sometimes we fail to be so smart spiritually speaking. For example, take the powerful and handy tool of prayer. Do we use it enough? Or do we operate on a big project with hand tools or mixing spoons inadequate for the task? To encourage us this morning, our Savior Jesus himself urges us to: **ASK! SEEK! KNOCK!** He assures us: (1) **GOD RESPONDS TO PRAYER**, (2) **GOD GIVES US GOOD GIFTS THROUGH PRAYER**, and (3) **OTHERS NEED OUR PRAYERS**, as well. So, pray!

Part One: God Responds to Prayer

As God's Word to us today opens, it's early in Jesus' ministry. Jesus is winding up his lengthiest sermon on record. He's preaching to his followers the Sermon on the Mount. And near the end, he addresses the issue of prayer.

Maybe Jesus is thinking of us at this point. Maybe he's pondering why it is that very often we don't pray as we should. Is it that often we don't pray because deep down we figure that it really won't do any good?

Jesus knows human nature. He knows how prone we are to doubt. Jesus knows it's tempting for us to think, "Well, I may ask God for something, but that's no guarantee he'll give me anything. And he may always respond to some people's prayers, but he doesn't always listen to little old me."

To all of this, Jesus responds—and listen carefully: *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; HE WHO SEEKS finds; and TO HIM WHO KNOCKS, the door will be opened.*

So: None of this nonsense that God doesn't respond! None of this nonsense that God only promises to listen to certain really good Christians! No, in prayer: God listens to you, and he responds to you.

Isn't that great? I mean: suppose every door you ever knocked on found somebody at home. Wow! Wouldn't that be handy? (I know it would make my work as a pastor easier!) Suppose every time you lost something, you knew you'd eventually find it. Wouldn't that be great? And that's what God is promising you right here in prayer!

So, pray! because you know that when you do, you will receive—most of the time more than you expected. You will find—more than you were looking for. And God's heart will be opened to you—wider than you can imagine. Don't let any rationalization get in the way of that! You have Christ's own word – right here! – to assure you.

Part Two: God Gives Us Good Gifts through Prayer

But ... does the Lord really mean that much good for you? You'll ask, and you'll receive, all right, but doesn't it sometimes seem like a punch in the gut? You'll seek, and you'll find, but doesn't it sometimes seem like something of lesser value? You'll knock, and it will be opened all right: a door to further unhappiness....

No, it's not that way—even if it appears that way sometimes: because again, you have God's own Word for good for you. Jesus himself assures you: *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? 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!*

I mean: these words are really compelling, aren't they? You have a little boy. You're hungry little boy says, "Mommy, Daddy, I'm hungry. Can I have something to eat?" And you grab a plate, and a rock from the landscaping in the front yard, and you slap the rock – clang! – on the plate, and say, "There you go, you little wretch!" No! We'd never do that! So, do you really think God would do that to us, his little children?!

Or you have a little girl. And she says, "Mommy, Daddy, could we have fish sticks tonight?" And you say, "Sure," you little wretch, and you go out, and catch a snake, and you bring the plate with a cover over it, and you say, "Here you go," and you lift the cover, and a snake springs out into the lap of your little girl. No way!!! You'd never do that! And you think God would pull that on you?!

We are by birth and nature evil. And yet, we'd never harm our children. God is perfect goodness. And he has adopted us into his own family as his children. You know that if we ask him for something, he's going to give us something good—and maybe even a hundred times better than what we'd been asking for.

I mean: we may pray for the recovery of our health—or that of somebody else. Pretty usually, God grants it. But sometimes he gives us something even better: eternal life in heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. We may pray for more money. Pretty usually, God helps us out. But sometimes he gives us something better: like self-control, and a greater reliance on him. We may pray for healed relationships. God may give us that, or God may draw us close to him and give us an even greater relationship to him.

Part Three: Others Need Our Prayers

So, pray! And pray with full confidence that the dear Lord will respond for good for you. And ... pray for others also. After all, Jesus concludes: ***So in everything, do [for] others what you would have them do [for] you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.***

That, of course, is the Golden Rule. It's the highest expression of love toward one another. Whatever another's godly needs are—we will aim to supply them. And of course, we cannot do that perfectly. But Jesus did. He summed up the Law and the Prophets – he fulfilled God's Word – by handling our deepest needs: by burying sin and death for us.

Anyway, this Golden Rule applies also to prayer, doesn't it? What would it feel like if you knew how fervently others were praying to God for you for good? What if you knew that was happening really regularly? Wouldn't that be great comfort?! Well, in everything – also in prayer – do for others what you would have them do for you. When you see other people sick, offer to pray for them—and be sure that you do that! When you see other people lonely or agitated, needy or poor, pray for them!—and be sure to supply their needs as much as you can, as well.

Conclusion: There Was One Time When Prayer Failed...

So, don't neglect to pray! It's a useful, powerful tool! God responds to prayer. God gives us good gifts through prayer. And others need our prayers. We ought, almost always, to be praying!

Now, let me conclude with a story of prayer. It's a true story.... Once upon a time, far far away, there was a fellow (?) ... yeah, I remember, it was a fellow ... who was very needy. He was, uh—he was incurably sick. In fact, he was soon going to die. The guy didn't have any friends any more. What few friends he used to have had left him—and his best friend, too. This guy didn't even have any money to purchase help, or any marketable resources to make a little money to purchase help for himself.

But he prayed. And you know now the power and the usefulness of prayer, so it won't surprise you that ... nobody listened (!). Was he praying to the wrong God? No, he was praying to our God. But did he believe in our God? Yeah, he had a healthy faith in our God.

But our God didn't respond. Instead, God forsook this fellow. God abandoned him. God condemned him. God punished him with all the fury of hell.

And all the most important prayers by believers throughout the ages were answered. Our sins were forgiven. Our guilt was paid for. Our righteousness was purchased. Our eternal life was gained.

And then, God responded. The Bible says: *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, HE OFFERED UP PRAYERS AND PETITIONS with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, AND HE WAS HEARD because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once [he was brought to his goal], HE BECAME THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION for all who [submissively listen to] him.*

And I guess that gives us another reason to pray, doesn't it? “Lord, finally, thank you—thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus, our Savior!” Amen.

The Bible urges us: *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.* So, let's be sure to pray! Amen.