

Matthew 7:7-11

Why We Pray

Introduction

- I'm just curious: How many of you struggle with prayer / wish your prayer life were better?
- RC Sproul: If Jesus had one complaint about his bride it's that she doesn't talk to him as often as he'd like.
- I struggle with prayer as well.
- Even though God has answered some amazing prayers in my life, I still struggle.
- Does he care? Is my request pure? He's sovereign anyway, does it matter?
- Good part of preaching on prayer: forces me to pray.
- For some: prayer is second nature - why not pray?
- But for most it's a struggle.
- Any time we talk about prayer → guilt b/c we don't do it enough.
- How many of you have prayed more as a result of feeling guilty?
- Guilt trips don't work with family/friends, don't work with prayer either.
- Guilt is not my goal.
- We should all pray more, agreed? We're all guilty.
- Jesus' sacrificial death and glorious resurrection covers all sins including our prayerlessness.
- Not trying to guilt you into prayer - Jesus is not trying to guilt you into prayer.
- Part of Jesus' sermon was dedicated to motivation to pray b/c **everyone** struggles with prayer.
- Goal is that we would pray more b/c we have a right understanding of God!
- Pray more because God answers prayer and rewards prayer and loves to give good things.
- Here's the beauty: Jesus gives us 5 reasons to pray.
- For every reason/excuse not to pray, Jesus offers a reason to pray.

Context

- This not the first time Jesus has mentioned prayer in SOTM.
- Remember: **Matt. 6:9-15** how to pray.
- Don't pray just to be seen by others, don't pray long prayers b/c longer does not = better.
- Pray privately and pray concisely.
- And even back there, there was reward - reasons to pray.
- **Turn to 6:5-6, 14-15. Read**
- God will reward and God will forgive.
- Safe to say: prayer mention 3 times in this sermon = important!
- We've seen how to pray, here are 5 reasons why to pray:

1) Pray because God commands us. Read 7

- Most striking aspect: command! **GK** imperatives: ask, seek, knock.
- Not "if you ask/seek/knock" - do it.
- Whereas chapter 6 assumed someone would want to pray, here we are commanded.
- Some extent: If God commands it, we should do it joyfully in service to him.
- If you love me, you'll what? Obey my commands (**John 14:15**)
- "Prayer is hard" - So are the other commandments, we keep them.
- "I don't feel like it" - What other commandments get a pass because of our feelings?
- This is a basic command - we know we are commanded.
- **1 Thess. 5:17**: Pray without what? Ceasing.
- If this were any other command: we'd be working diligently to do it.
- Ask/seek/knock = synonyms of prayer.
- We are commanded to come and ask God for what we need and want.
- Why look for your keys when they're lost? Expect to find them.
- Why knock on your neighbor's door when you need some help? Expect it to be opened.
- There's no real distinction here from the sovereignty of God and the means of prayer that he commands and uses.

2) Pray because God answers prayer. Read 7-8

- If Jesus "Just pray b/c it's commanded" that would be enough.
- But part of the reason we should pray is because God answers!
- Ask, seek, knock → **given, finding, opened** - repeated twice. **7-8**

- Expectation is that God hears, cares and will answer us.
- Imagine you knew Bill Gates or Warren Buffet or Jeff Bezos (richest men) and knew they loved you and cared for you and told you over and over you could text them anytime asking for anything, would you?
- Those jokers pale in comparison to God, who will answer us.
- **Jas. 4:2:** You do not have b/c you do not what? Ask!
- Friend's father-in-law: you don't ask, you don't get.
- Dave A.: If you don't ask, the answer is always no.
- Catch 22: "God doesn't answer my prayers;" same person: "I don't pray enough" - do you think?
- BTW: prayer formats are fine: ACTS (adoration, confession, thanks, supplication).
- Great! We need to adore God - praise him - and confess and thank him.
- Notice: Here Jesus is just talking about 1 thing: asking.
- It's okay to ask God for things. Big things, good things, things if we're honest we don't think he'll ever answer!
- He's not going to shame us or disown us or write us off.
- Wonder of wonders: he might just give it to us.
- God commands it, God answers.

3) **Pray non-stop because God answers non-stop. Read 8**

- Why does Jesus repeat the command in **Vs. 8**?
- Poetic, rhetorical flourish? Sure.
- But sometimes poetry highlights some things, here's 2:
- 1) **Vs. 8:** For **everyone**.
- This promise is for every one of God's children; everyone who is in the Kingdom.
- There are no second-class citizens in God's household - *everyone* who asks receives.
- **Q:** Under 7 years old? Over 60? In Christ, through Holy Spirit, have same exact access to God.
- The baby in Christ - saved 3 weeks ago - has same access and promise as the godly saint of 50 years.
- Maybe you're in awe of the person who keeps getting prayer answered "they're really godly."
- Maybe they're not - maybe they just ask more than you do, so they get more than you do.
- I tried to tally up the times my kids asked me for stuff this last week while on vacation. So I took 1 hour and counted all the times I was asked things, multiplied by 16 hours each day and 5 days on vacation. It was 96,00 questions.
- Not really, but it feels like that - I'd be in the act of getting them dessert and they'd ask me for it 5 times.
- Some of my kids ask more than others & you know what? Those kids often get more. Why? Just because they ask.
- Obviously God knows what we need before we ask (**Matt. 6:8**) & God is sovereign.
- But God is clear we have to ask!
- There is an act of humility/faith/trust/need in the act of asking.
- This promise is for **everyone** in the Kingdom - maybe we should ask more.
- 2) Nerdy: the verb tense changes: Lit. "the one **asking**," the one **seeking**, the one **knocking**.
- Emphasis on a person who continually does this, is defined by asking.
- There is a persistence in prayer **but** there is also persistence in answer!
- Ill: We often view answered prayer like buying lottery tickets: usually we lose, sometimes we get a little something, rarely do we hit the big one.
- Instead: We should view asking God like a generous father who wants to give us out of his treasure.
- Stick with me: I'll balance this out at the end.
- We're not prosperity gospel, name-it-claim-it.
- But Jesus is clear: the one who keeps on asking is the one who keeps on getting because God keeps on giving.
- No limit on blessing; no cap on requests/day; not spiritual food stamps where we've hit our monthly limit; fishing limit; 5 items at Costco at the discounted price.
- "You keep on asking, God will keep on giving."
- Show with 2 parables:
- **Turn to Luke 11:1-13.** Almost identical to Matthew w/ a parable. **Read**
- Here Jesus combines the Lord's prayer with persistence.
- How much do we ask?
- Steve Whinery: "Ask until the point we think we are annoying God."
- Lesser-to-greater argument:
- Basically, if this small thing is true, how much more this big thing.
- "If you get sunburned in Spokane, how much more Mexico."

- “If a little ice cream is good, more is what?” Better.
- Jesus uses this over and over; here: God is **not** like this guy who is annoyed (lesser).
- God actually **wants** to answer the prayer and will answer it (greater).
- You say: “I didn’t ask for the Spirit” - neither did this guy.
- He asked for bread. Jesus said ask for bread - why does he say we get the Spirit?
- B/c in the event the answer is “no” God will still provide for us the best thing we could possible ask for: him to dwell in us in power.
- That’s our consolation prize: God inside us, empowering us for his glory.
- Children of the Kingdom don’t go home losers when the answer is no.
- If the answer is no we still have the biggest blessing imaginable.
- Jesus talks about prayer again in **Luke 18:1-8** - almost the same exact principle. **Read 1**
- Before we read more: Luke tells us this is the point: so that we don’t lose heart - we pray and never give up!
- The specific context is when believers cry out because of injustice and mistreatment.
- But that just proves the point: no matter **what** we are asking for, we are to ask persistently.
- Don’t lose heart/keep going/keep praying!
- Jesus knew, Luke knew, God knows that it’s easy to lose heart in prayer.
- So this whole parable is an encouragement to keep praying. **Read 2-8**
- Again: lesser-to-greater - this unjust judge still gave justice! The widow got what she wanted from a sinful judge.
- How much more will God answer us!
- He’s not unjust - he is justice.
- And he’s not annoyed by us, we are his elect - he chose us!
- I think Jesus’ question is rhetorical: “When I come, will my people have believed this.”
- If we believe this then we’ll pray.
- We are to ask over and over and over knowing God will give over and over.
- **Turn back to Matt 7.**
- Pray b/c God 1 commands it / 2 answers it / 3 answers non stop

4) Pray because you answer requests from your kids. Read 9-11

- So Jesus gives us an example that every parent knows well:
- If our kid is hungry, we don’t go out to the garage, grab a brick and put it on a plate.
- Get a baby rattlesnake, put it in a cereal bowl, pour some milk in and say “bon appetite.”
- No normal parent does that.
- **Side:** I know there are times when kids ask for food and they don’t get some (10 minutes before dinner, they didn’t finish their last meal, excuse to not go to bed).
- If your kid asks you for basic things, don’t harass them.
- Jesus assumes here that basic human decency is such that parents gladly feed their hungry kids.
- In fact: calls us evil!
- We’re wicked/sinful/depraved/wretches - yet we know how to give good gifts. **Read 11**
- Do we really think somehow we’re more generous/kind/loving than God? No chance.
- Remember: reading this passage, then tucking my son in at night thinking how much I loved him and would give him anything. It occurred to me: God loves me so much more than I could ever love my little son.
- He will give me so much more than I can ever give my son.
- But sometimes I think I’m better at giving than God is.
- See, we often view God like Mark Twain: that God really is a little spiteful and will toss us a serpent every once in a while for dinner just for fun.
- No, that’s wrong. God is so far above us that however much we strive to be good parents to our kids, God is a better parent to us.

5) Pray because God loves to give good gifts. Read 10-11

- Can I ask: Do you really believe God wants to give you **good** things? Like, really believe it?
- Or do you think God’s a drill sergeant in boot camp? He’s a hard man who just wants to toughen us up?
- Listen, God wants to give us good things; he delights in it.
- I love giving my kids good things. I love Christmas, but I also love just random stuff.
- My kids love going to McDonald’s to play on the toys - let’s do it.
- Jesus says: **How much more!**
- Listen: God’s not like you. He’s not evil. He loves giving his children the best possible gifts imaginable.
- He gives without reproach and he always gives the best and perfect gifts.

- **Jas. 1:20:** Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of heavenly lights with whom there is no shadow of turning.
- Sometimes our gifts are bad - all of God's gifts are perfect and he loves to give them.

- I want to balance this just a little; I don't want to undermine everything I've said here.
- We don't believe in the prosperity gospel, but we do believe God gives when we ask.
- What's the balance?
- God will give us these things **according to his will** - if God wills.
- That's the only limit to God answering us - what we're asking might not be his will.
- It doesn't mean it's wrong to ask, doesn't mean we should stop - just might not be his will.
- My little kids ask me for a million things every day - they don't get it all b/c it's not all my will.
- But I never fault them for asking.
- It might not be God's will to give you your request - that's okay.
- Remember the consolation prize? The Holy Spirit.
- But we know his will is for us to ask, he wants us to, he wants to bless us and give us good gifts.

Eph 3:20: Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Pray