

A • S • K (Part 3)

Introduction

The Text

¹ Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread, ⁴ and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵ And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:1–13)

Quick Orientation

- A. We’ve spent three weeks now on [vv. 1-4](#) and what’s come to be known as the Lord’s Prayer. We’ve seen that prayer involves Adoring Him (calling Him “Father”), Surrendering to Him (“It’s about Your name and Your Kingdom”), and Knocking (“I need bread, I need forgiveness, I need You to keep me from temptation”).
 - 1. If you were here last week, you’ll recall that I lumped those personal requests there in [vv. 3-4](#) under this idea of Knocking in particular because of where Jesus goes next in [vv. 5-13](#), which is really what we’ll be focusing on here this morning.
- B. First, I’ll do a quick exposition of these verses. And we’ll put it under the heading: (1) God Is Ready And Happy to Give. Because I think that’s what we’ll see quite plainly.
 - 1. But, then, I actually want to circle back on this and ask: If God really is ready and happy to give . . . (2) Why Does It Often Feel Like He Isn’t? In other words, we will take up the troubling dilemma of apparent unanswered prayers.
 - a. My sense is that this is the sort of thing that rises to the surface when we try to connect Jesus’ words in our text here with the reality of our experience. So I will try to offer a bit of help.

(1) God Is Ready and Happy to Give

- A. So then, let's look at [vv. 5-13](#) more closely. When we break this down, what we see is that Jesus first gives us a parable there in [vv. 5-8](#). And then He comes out and offers up a sort of interpretation and elaboration on it in [vv. 9-13](#).

Verses 5-8

- A. With regard to the parable, we first meet a desperate man. It's midnight, and it seems a traveling friend of his has surprised him with a visit, showing up at his doorstep, hungry. But this man has nothing to set before his guest. He has nothing with which to play the host. He is defaulting on what was a sacred duty in the ancient world: hospitality.
- B. So he runs over to a friend's house and starts banging on the door, in hopes of getting some bread. It's really quite a humorous scene. Note, in particular, the man's response coming from inside: ["Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything"](#) (v. 7).
1. Evidently this friend was a poor man living in a one-roomed house. The whole family, it seems, was sleeping in one room together. And it's funny, but, if you noticed, his concern doesn't seem so much to be about giving the bread or not. Instead it seems to revolve around this whole idea of waking his children.
 - a. And if you're a parent of little kids, you get this. When we finally get the kids to sleep around my house, I swear I can hear the angels break out into a chorus of hallelujahs in the sky above our house. There's quiet, there's mommy and daddy time, there's rest. And once you have them down, you're willing to do just about anything to keep from waking them. Every room is equipped with white noise. We take our shoes off before walking down the hall. We used to head from the family room to our bed by using the outside doors just to keep from passing by the kids' rooms. In the morning, I'll grind the coffee in the garage. I'll wake up the neighbors, that's fine, but not my kids. Little kids getting their sleep is important for the whole household's sanity.
- C. Now the irony in this man's approach here is presumably he's yelling from the room at such a volume that this guy can hear his response from outside. If the kids weren't awake after all the knocking, they certainly are awake now.
1. But, regardless, we get the point. This man is not having it. But the brother keeps knocking. And Jesus says: ["I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs"](#) (v. 8).
- D. Now we must see what Jesus is doing here. It's something that will be made even plainer in His explanation that follows in [vv. 9-13](#). But let's focus our attention on this story for a moment. What is Jesus saying about prayer and God?

1. Well, to be clear, He is not saying that God is like this dude yelling out from his bed. He is not saying that God is tired, selfish, reluctant to give, but if we badger Him enough, we shall probably be able to rouse Him and get what we want. That is emphatically not the point.
 - a. It's not as if Jesus is teaching us God is some sort of piñata in the sky. He's a bit resistant at first, but if you hit Him repeatedly and with enough force you just might get some candy out. That's not the point. Quite the opposite, in fact.
2. This is what we might call a lesser to greater argument. The idea is this: If even this tired, selfish, reluctant man will finally get up and give his friend what he is bugging him for, HOW MUCH MORE will your Father—who never sleeps, who is always thinking of you, who is ready and happy to give to you—how much more will He give to you what you are asking of Him?! That's the point.

Verses 9-13

- A. That's what becomes even clearer in the explanation that follows in vv. 9-13. Let's begin there at v. 9: "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." What a stunning thing to say!
- B. The redundancy of v. 10 reinforces the point. I love this. We hear this promise and we think at once: "How can such a thing be." And Jesus' response is, in essence, because it is!
 1. Look at it in full: "⁹ I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.¹⁰ For [introducing the basis, the reason the preceding statement is true] everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (vv. 9-10).
 - a. "That's not a real basis or reason Jesus. That's just a restatement of the point." But it makes it all the more certain for us, does it not? It's as if He's saying: "It's true because it's true."
 - i. In any case, He does go from here to provide a bit more of this basis we've been looking for. And wouldn't you know it, it has to do with the fatherhood of God.
- C. In vv. 11-13 Jesus shifts the image but He's making the same point as the parable above. In the parable He was talking about friends, but here, again, He returns to this idea of God as Father. He can't get away from this point. It's the way He began the Lord's prayer back in v. 2 and it is the way He will here end His discussion on prayer as well. Knowing God as Father truly is what holds all of this together: "¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (vv. 11-13).
 1. So here, then, we are likened to kids asking our dad for help. And Jesus makes the case that even though earthly dads are by nature evil, often even they still know how to care for their kids.

- a. You have to love this. Jesus is not afraid to say it like it is. “If you then, who are evil . . .” (v. 13a). He just says it like it’s nothing. If we were to say this out on the streets we’d likely get stoned. “Who are you to tell me that? Mama always said I was special!” But He just says it.

- D. And again, here more clearly than ever, He’s making this lesser to greater point. If even fallen, unregenerate, evil dads have enough sense to not give their children serpents or scorpions, but instead give them good things, HOW MUCH MORE will your heavenly Father—who, by implication, is perfect, holy, the ideal in every sense of the term—how much more will He give you what is good?!
 - 1. Do you see how the logic is working here?

- E. But seeing it and feeling it are two different things. I can know this as true from the page, but would I say it is true in my life?
 - 1. Does anybody feel like God has given them the shaft lately? Like you’ve prayed on an issue until your voice went hoarse, like you’ve sought for a thing for years, like you’ve knocked on that door until your knuckles bled, and nothing, it would seem, has opened up for you. Far from it.
 - a. This text says the door is going to fling wide, the other day, when I was praying, I could’ve sworn I heard the deadbolt click. If He’s so ready to open to us, why do we often feel, not like a beloved child, but like an unwanted guest?!

(2) Why Does It Often Feel Like He Isn’t?

- A. In other words: If God is ready and happy to give . . . Why Does It Often Feel Like He Isn’t? While I can’t do this question full justice, I have put together four reasons here for us to consider.

(1) Because We Don’t Ask

- A. The first thing we must address is whether we are actually asking anything of God in the first place. It might be that we do not know God as ready and happy to give because we actually rarely ever ask Him for things.
 - 1. I get this idea from [James 4:2](#) where he writes: “You do not have, because you do not ask.”

- B. While there are many reasons we might fail to ask God for things in prayer, it seems to me that one of the more significant reasons we must consider is something we touched on last week with our discussion of “daily bread” ([Luke 11:3](#)). We often don’t ask because we feel the matter which concerns us to be too small or insignificant for Him. I suppose, if I could put it harshly, we’re not always sure He cares or would want to be bothered with most things we deal with day to day.

- C. As I’ve been reading through that book [A Praying Life](#) by Paul Miller, I came across his recounting of a conversation he had with his mom. He’d just read a book on prayer and in it the author was implying that we shouldn’t pray for trivial things like parking places. These requests are selfish, they

are bordering on irreverence, and make your relationship with God seem cheap. I wonder if you've ever felt this way?

1. Well, Paul, brought this concern to his mom, Rose Marie Miller, an awesome woman of God who's actually written a few books of her own, and I just love her response: "How else would you find a parking place?" (p. 119). She's exactly right.
- D. Here's what we must see: When we don't pray about a parking spot, we are, in effect, trying to operate in that area of our life on our own. "These things are mine to deal with, mine to work out, mine to stress over. I would feel rather stupid, childish, praying over a parking spot."
1. When we act in such a way we unwittingly set up a dividing wall that runs right through the activities of our lives. We imagine that with certain big-ticket items God is ready to roll up His sleeves and help, but He is not to be bothered with lesser things. Some things we can talk to God about—church, witnessing, Bible study, etc., but other things He shouldn't be bothered with—housework, head colds, parking spots.
- E. Our confusion on this point bars God from the great majority of our lives. And then we wonder why Christianity often feels so irrelevant to the here and now. On the contrary, He wants to be in every detail. Indeed, He must be in every detail!
1. The Scriptures say you need Him for every breath.
 2. The Scriptures say He's the One ultimately responsible for the food in your pantry and the clothes in your closet.
 3. The Scriptures say He's counted every hair on your head and numbered every day of your life.
 - a. You matter to Him. Every mundane moment of your life matters to Him. If you're thinking about it, turn it outward in conversation to Him about it. Ask for help. He loves it.
- F. Here is, perhaps, a good place to bring up this unique Greek word back in our text translated "impudence" (v. 8)— "yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs."
1. The Greek word here literally means: without respect, modesty, shame. The standard Greek dictionary defines it as a "lack of sensitivity to what is proper . . . [a] carelessness about the good opinion of others . . . [an] ignoring of convention" (BDAG).
- G. There's a shamelessness, bordering on disrespect, in this desperate man's asking, seeking, knocking. And, get this, Jesus is holding him out as a role model for us! "This is the sort of way you should behave with God!"
1. That should tell us something about our Father. He is practically begging us here to bother him, to barge in and bug Him about anything that is on our hearts. He's inviting us to truly act like little kids. He's wanting to get us in the game, whether we are asking rightly or not. All that will be worked out as we engage with Him. But He wants us to engage! That is the important place to begin.

- a. If we are to know this always-giving-finding-opening heart of our Father, we have to start asking Him for what we need. Are you?

(2) Because We Ask Wrongly

- A. Now, I can't spend much time on this one, but the fact is that some of us don't experience the Father as He's described in our text because we don't ask. But for others of us it's because of the way in which we do.
- B. James actually continues on this subject in [James 4:3](#) where he writes: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."
 1. The idea here, simply put, is that you ask God for things all right, but not with any concern for Him or others. You just want His stuff and you've heard that prayer might be an effective way of getting at it.
- C. Listen to me. The fact that God doesn't always answer these kinds of prayers doesn't make Him a bad Father. On the contrary, it makes Him a good One.
 1. Doesn't every parent get this? What kind of dad would I be, if whatever my kids asked for, however bad it would be for them, I just gave it to them? "You want another piece of cake, sure . . . You want to stay up until eleven on a school night, why not? . . . You want to go play freeze tag in the street, just make sure you put on some shoes."
- D. If God gave you everything you asked, it would destroy you. Do you get that? Sometimes, one of the most loving things He can do is withhold, because oftentimes it wakes us up and brings us back to Him . . . the One prayer is really all about.
 1. And that leads to the third reason I might give us here.

(3) Because He Has Something Better

- A. So we start asking, but as we come our hearts are all a mess—we're asking with the wrong motives, in the wrong ways, and for the wrong things. But God can work with that. The dialogue has started. He begins to shape and shift our affections towards Himself.
- B. When it comes to prayer, it seems to me one of the biggest problems we have is with the grid through which we view it. We tend to view it within the grid of pragmatism, utility. What we often do is pray once or twice for a thing and then, when God doesn't seem to answer, we say things like: "See. I knew it. Prayer doesn't work." Pragmatism.
 1. But this is not what Jesus is inviting us into here. He's not inviting us into a sort of pragmatic, utilitarian, ask-and-get equation. He's inviting us into relationship. That's what prayer is. It's relationship with the Father.
- C. So here's what this means: When you go to pray, you don't just ask once or twice for a thing and then, when it doesn't happen, quit. No. You keep asking, and seeking, and knocking. Keep pressing

in and, as you do, something surprising will happen: You will meet with God! God opens the door to Himself as it were and you will never be the same.

1. At the end, whether you do or don't get exactly what you were asking for, in the way you were asking for it, at the time you were asking for it, well, none of that will matter all that much anymore. You shall have God, and that is always the point of prayer.
- D. I suspect that is why Jesus comes out at the end of our text the way that He does. Did you notice it? “¹¹What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (vv. 11-13).
1. “Give the Holy Spirit”? No one's asking for that, Jesus. We want bread and fish. We are asking for stuff, but He gives us Himself. The Holy Spirit is none other than His Spirit, and we are granted intimacy, abiding, satisfying relationship with Him. That's the point of prayer. Not pragmatism or utility, but relationship and help from God.
 - a. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane three times for the burden of the cross to be taken from Him. God said no, but He sent an angel to strengthen Him for the task.
 - b. Paul prayed three times for the thorn in His flesh to be removed, whatever that was. God said no, but Jesus shows up to Him and says: “My strength will be made perfect in your weakness. I will help you in this.”
 - c. We may pray for things three hundred times over. God may come and say no, but He promises to give us His Holy Spirit.
- E. Even if the answer is no to things we are asking for in the moment, the door is still swinging open for relationship. Do you see? He will not leave us without help. He will give us Himself.

(4) Because He's Telling a Longer Story

- A. The fourth and final thing to remember, when your prayers seem unanswered and you don't get what God is doing in your life, is that He's telling a longer story. He's not done yet.
- B. It's so interesting. I don't have time to go much into this now, but line for line from the Lord's Prayer that Jesus gave us back in [Luke 11:2-4](#), there are massive parallels with Israel's story in the OT, particularly with their journey from the house of slavery in Egypt to the land of promise in Canaan. Consider . . .
 1. “Father”—I wonder if you realize that really it's at the Exodus that God first reveals Himself as Father to Israel: “²² [Say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son,²³ . . . Let my son go” (Ex 4:22–23).
 2. “Hallowed by your name”—Really it was concern for God's name that motivated the whole freedom from Egypt: “ [Say to Pharaoh] . . . for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (Ex 9:16). This is how my name is going to be hallowed among the nations. When they see what, in grace and power, I can do.

3. **“Your kingdom come”**—The first place we encounter God described as king in the Bible is [Ex 15:18](#), right when He gets done parting the Red Sea: **“The Lord will reign forever and ever.”**
 4. **“Give us this day our daily bread”**—This clearly connects us with the manna which God provided for His people in their wilderness journey en route to the Promised Land.
 5. **“Forgive us our sins”**—It was along Israel’s wilderness journey, at Mount Sinai, that God first makes official provision for the forgiveness of their sins through sacrifice.
 6. **“Lead us not into temptation”**—The wilderness is the place of testing. And God is upholding them and leading them through it and into Canaan.
- C. The whole story of Israel, from Egypt to Canaan, is invoked in the lines of this prayer Jesus is teaching us. Now why would this be important? Why does He want us to think of Israel’s story as we set out to pray to God ourselves?
1. Well, do you remember Israel’s story? Do you remember the tension, the confusion, the conflict. Things God promised them seemed, at times, forgotten. They would cry out to Him and feel abandoned. “God, you have brought us out here, not to save us, but to kill us!” (Have you ever felt like that?) They would ask, seek, knock and it seemed as if nothing was happening. They didn’t see the bigger story.
 - a. They didn’t realize that God wasn’t done writing. He was taking them from Egypt to Canaan. He would be faithful in the end.
- D. And Jesus wants us to remember this sort of thing as we pray. God is telling a longer story. Prayers we would consider unanswered today, may very well be answered tomorrow, perhaps in ways we would never expect. God is with us in the story.
- E. We had a book out last night before bed. It has these little devotionals for kids in it. Levi was sitting in my lap and we were thumbing through the pictures, and he stopped me at this one. And it just melted my heart. Because he pointed to it with his little finger and said: “Dadda! Walk! Dadda!”
1. And, of course, I look and the author’s talking about how God walks with us. And I thought, you know, I’m that kid. God is my Dad, walking with me through this unfolding story. Through the good and the hard . . . to the end.
- F. Let me just read to you what this lady wrote on this. Reflecting on [Isa 42:6](#) which speaks of God taking us by the hand and protecting us, she writes: **“When you’re in the dark or on the narrow path, you need someone to lead you by the hand, to hold your hand tight. You need someone to rely on. God says we can rely on him: ‘I’ve got you by the hand / And I’ll never let you go! / No matter where you go, / No matter what you do, / You always have / A hand to hold you. / I will lead you, / Guide you, / Keep you. / Even through death / I won’t ever let you go!”**
1. He will walk with us and keep us to the end of this story . . . to glory!
 - a. Where everything you’ve ever asked for will be given in ways you could never have even imagined; where everything you’ve ever sought will be found in God Himself; where the door upon which you’ve been knocking will fling wide at last and you shall be face to face . . . with your Father!

(5) We Lose Sight of the Cross

A. We talk about this verse often here, but in [Rom 8:32](#): “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

1. It’s another lesser to greater argument, did you catch it? If God is going to lay down His highest treasure for the forgiveness of our sins at the cross, He’s not going to suddenly recoil when you and I come asking for pocket change—He’s going to move towards, He’s going to help, He’s going to give.

B. So, back in our text, Jesus is teaching us about the giving heart of His Father here, knowing full well that He Himself would be the Father’s greatest gift to us.

Let’s come to the Father through Jesus now . . . and pray!