

Matthew 7.7-12
Ask, Seek, Knock; Three Spiritual Disciplines
WRCOB 9.8.24

A doctor was late for a meeting at VCU
And couldn't find a parking space.

He frantically drove around the parking deck
But every space was filled.

He was not a praying man
But desperation drove him
To look upwards to heaven and pray

"Lord, I beg you."

"If you find me a parking spot
I promise I'll go to church every Sunday
For the rest of my life."

Just then, a parking space appeared.

In relief the doctor said
"Never mind, God, I found one."

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This story, as familiar, as it might be to us
Illustrates a truth we overlook

We pay little attention when God answers prayer
Especially when we pray, "Thy will be done."

We'd much rather pray for OUR will to be done.

Because the truth is, asking for God's will to be done
Is a scary business.

It's a frightening thought to surrender to a higher power
To trust for God's will to be done in our lives.

Why? There's no telling what God might ask of us.

Yet, as followers of Christ
Our ultimate prayer, our ultimate purpose in life
Is to give praise and service to our God

It's an act of courage to embrace the prayer
"not my will, but thine be done,"
And trust that God's plan is ultimately better
Than anything we can imagine.

It begins with asking, seeking, and knocking
Three steps outlined in today's Scripture Lesson.

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The VCU doctor "asked" for a parking space
But his prayer was ultimately self-serving.

He didn't truly "seek" God's will
Nor did he "knock" on the door of heaven
With persistence and faith.

Jesus, in in our passage today
Calls us to a three spiritual disciplines

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

1

- **Ask:** We must be bold in our prayers, not limiting God's power by our own limited vision. As Phillip Brooks writes, "Pray the largest prayers. You cannot think a prayer so large that God, in answering it, will not wish you had made it larger."

- **Seek:** Asking is just the first step. We must actively seek God's will, not just passively waiting for an answer. This means spending time in His word, reflecting on His character, and being open to His guidance in every aspect of our lives.
- **Knock:** This is about persistence and faith. Sometimes God's answers don't come immediately. We need to keep knocking, trusting that His timing is perfect and His purpose is good.

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As I said, praying for God's will
And trusting in God's sovereignty is scary.

I'm reminded of a story my chaplain supervisor told me.
When I was in Clinical Pastoral Education
At the Medical College of Virginia.

She sat in the waiting room of a hospital
While her child was in emergency surgery

It was a dire situation.

Another woman was there with a child also in surgery
Her child's case was serious too.

They shared with one another
And realized they were both believers.

The one lady asked my supervisor
If she might pray for her.

She said yes, she'd be grateful.

The woman asked, how she might pray.

The clinical supervisor replied
“Pray for strength to get through this!”

The other lady looked astonished.

“Is that it?”

“Don’t you want me to pray for your daughter
That God might save her life
That she might have a full and complete healing?”

“Well, yes,” she replied, “for that too.”

Essentially the supervisor shared later
She was scared to pray for something like that
Scared it might not come true

She restrained from praying what was truly on her heart
For fear God wouldn’t or couldn’t intervene.

Says Andrew Murray, a South African pastor/evangelist

2

*Beware in your prayer, above everything, of limiting
God, not only by unbelief but by fancying that you know
what [God] can or can’t do.*

Jesus goes on to say

“Let me ask you, if a child asks for bread
Who gives him a stone?”

“Or asks for a fish, who would give him a snake?”

“If then, we know how to give good gifts to our children
How much more will God give good things
To those who ask.”

Remember the story of the two women
In the hospital waiting room?

Both prayed for their children
Who were in emergency surgery.

One child survived, the other did not.

This tragic reality raises a difficult question:

Why does God seem to answer some prayers
And not others?

I don't the answer.

I know Job writes

3

Job 42:2 CEB

²I know you can do anything; no plan of yours can be opposed successfully.

And I know Paul says

4

Romans 8:28 CEB

²⁸We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God

No, we can't fully comprehend God's will
Or the intricate workings of God's plan.

But we are called to trust in God's sovereignty
Even when things don't go as we expected.

It's all a mystery, I grant you

But I ask you, you that follow Jesus
If Jesus tells us to pray with complete abandonment.

Do we say, “no, Jesus, I can’t do that?”

“I can’t pray boldly
Because if God won’t answer my prayer
In the way I want, it might shake
The very foundation of my faith.”

Jesus encourages to pray and not to lose heart.

He tells the parable
Of a widow who brings a complaint to a judge

The judge tries to ignore her

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Luke 18:4-5 CEB

4 For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don’t fear God or respect people, 5 but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. . . .”

This parable makes the point
In a humorous way that Jesus
Calls us to pray confidently and consistently.

6

Mark 11:24 NIV

24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

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Earlier I mentioned the paradoxical phrase
"Courageous submission"

It seems like opposite traits.

And yet, this is what God calls us to.

A willingness to relinquish control

A control we think we have but in reality, don't

And at the same time embrace a courageousness

To pray the prayer, "not my will, but thine be done"

But it is exactly these traits

That speak of deep and genuine faith.

It takes courage to trust God

Trusting God isn't a passive acceptance

But an active choice made with conviction.

Submission is recognizing

That we are not the ultimate authority in life

Courageous submission knows

There's a greater good

A higher purpose we are called to be a part of.

It means to constantly ask, seek and knock

That we might gain an understanding

How our will aligns with God's will.

It is not a sign of weakness

But, indeed, a true sign of strength

Trusting in a power greater than our own

Embracing a future guided by God

AND finding peace and purpose in doing so.

I quote from Phillip Brooks

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Do not pray for tasks equal to your power. Pray for powers equal to your task!"

In our prayers, we must not confine God's powers
By our own limited vision
Of what God is capable of doing

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There is a story about Arnold Palmer
Who once played a series of exhibition matches
In Saudi Arabia.

The king was so impressed by Palmer
That he wanted to give him a gift of appreciation.

Palmer quietly said that it wasn't necessary.
But the king insisted.

And so, Palmer suggested meekly
"Well, how about a golf club?"

"A golf club would be a beautiful memento
Of my visit to your lovely country."

The next day, delivered to Palmer's hotel room
Was the title to a golf club.

A thousand acres of trees, lakes
And a gorgeous clubhouse
Worth millions.

The moral of the story?

8

*When in the presence of the King
Don't ask for small gifts! (Brennan Manning)*

There's a vital truth in this.

We must pray for powers equal to our task.

We must not confine God's power
By our limited vision of what He is capable of doing.

In surrendering our will to God
We find true strength and peace.

We are called to embrace
This paradox of courageous submission
Knowing that in trusting God
We find our true purpose.

And so, may we not be afraid to ask, seek
And knock at the doors of heaven
Boldly and continuously

May we not be afraid to pray big
And to trust in God's power
Who answers our prayers
In ways we could never imagine. Amen.