

Ask!

In teaching us about prayer, Jesus emphasizes one point over and over, in the strongest possible terms: Ask! Bring all your needs to God your Father. Jesus repeatedly drives this message home, with both word and example.

Matthew 7:7-11

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7), Jesus teaches us how to live in the presence of our almighty, all-wise, all-loving Heavenly Father. He says that since we live every moment in the presence of such a God, it only makes sense to bring all our needs and concerns to Him. He delights to answer our prayers! Even an earthly father enjoys granting his child's requests when the child asks for something good. If we earthly fathers, with all our flaws, eagerly give good gifts to our children when they ask, won't our Heavenly Father gladly grant our good requests?

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7, NASB)

Luke's version of this teaching adds a meaningful twist. There Jesus says that if we ask our Heavenly Father for something good, He will give, not just a good gift, but the very best gift: *the Holy Spirit* (Luke 11:13, NASB). The gift that our Father most delights to give is Himself!

Luke 11:5-8

Jesus drives this point home with a story. Suppose a friend comes to you in the middle of the night, long after you've gone to bed, and asks to borrow food to feed an unexpected guest. What's more, imagine yourself in that time and place. It's dark, and there are no electric lights. You'd have to get up and light a candle or lantern. The door is bolted, and your family is all asleep with you, probably on the floor of your one-room cottage. Answering the friend's request means waking up the whole household.

You'd like to tell him, "Don't you know what time it is?!? Go away! Don't bother me!" But because he asks, you won't turn him away. You'll get up and give him all you can, as much as he needs.

Your Heavenly Father never sleeps, He's never inconvenienced, and His supply is endless. Won't He gladly grant your good requests if you are bold enough to ask?

Luke 18:1-8

A few chapters later in Luke, Jesus spins a story that makes the truth even clearer. Here He uses exaggeration to emphasize His point. Suppose the weakest, most helpless member of society (in that culture, a poor widow) needs the help of the most

uncooperative of all public officials (a stubborn judge who cares nothing about God, people, or justice).

He won't willingly help her. He'll do his very best to ignore her. But if she keeps asking long enough, he will give her what she wants just to get her off his back.

If even such an unkind person will honor persistent asking, how about our loving, just, ever-faithful Father?

Jesus ends the story with this: when we face a need, God's faithfulness is never in question. The only question is, will we trust Him enough to persevere in prayer?

Mark 11:12-14, 20-25

Finally, during the last week of His earthly ministry, Jesus made His point vividly, using a living object lesson that His disciples would never forget.

It was Passover week, and Jesus and His disciples were staying in Bethany, just two miles from Jerusalem. As they were walking to the city one morning, Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree at a distance, so he walked up to it, apparently looking for something to eat. But when He got close, the tree had nothing but leaves. He said to the tree, "*May no one ever eat fruit from you again!*" (Mark 11:14, NIV). He made sure the disciples were listening.

The next morning they passed the same tree, and it was completely dead. At Jesus' word, what had been a healthy tree the day before was now withered from the roots up.

They all knew that it wasn't the season for figs, so they understood that Jesus wasn't concerned with food. They were all ears as He made His point clear:

"Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him." (Mark 11:22-23, NASB)

Why Persistence?

Why does Jesus teach us to be so persistent in our prayers? Since God already knows our needs before we ask (Matthew 6:8), why must we continue to ask to get what we want?

Communication and trust are the life-breath of any relationship. Communication and trust—that is, prayer and faith—are the life-breath of our relationship with God.

For example, in a marriage, one of the most demanding challenges is learning to live with the inherent differences between husband and wife. So in our relationship with God, consider the incredible differences between Him and us. We are time-bound, pain-

sensitive, narrowed-visioned, self-centered creatures. God is eternal, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-loving. He is constantly way ahead of us and high above us. His sense of timing is completely different from ours. He understands much that we can't begin to grasp. Thus living in relationship with Him will require commitment, persistent trust, and patient endurance.

Our Father wants prayer to be our response to every need. Since our neediness will never end, prayer must never end. Faith will require us to continue to ask and continue to trust, sure that He will give what is best, and at just the right time.

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