

# Knock, Knock

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Luke 11: 1-13

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Have you ever been in one of those awkward moments in a restaurant with someone you have never eaten out with before? It's that moment right after you are served your food. You put your napkin in your lap, maybe salt your food, stir your iced tea, and then you look at each other. "Does she want to say a prayer?" "Does she think / always pray before a meal in a restaurant?" Or what about when you are at a restaurant and the family right beside you is praying.

As my son-in-law likes to say *AWKWARD!*

This must've been how the disciples felt when they were with Jesus that day. Usually Jesus had gone away to a deserted place by himself to say his prayers, but today—there were just too many people around, and he wanted to pray. *What's a Messiah to do?* He prayed. They didn't want to be disrespectful while Jesus was praying, but they were not quite sure what to do.

So, when Jesus finished his prayer, one of the disciples asked Jesus to teach *them* how to pray. He said John the Baptist taught his disciples how to pray, and we want to know, too, from you.

You know, there are some people that believe you don't *teach* prayer—that prayer bubbles up from your heart, --*I just wanna this and I just wanna that.*

When I was in seminary in my worship class, the professor asked us to raise our hands if we were more comfortable with written prayers or spontaneous prayers. It was a pretty equal mix. However—the spontaneous folks said they would be run out of church on a rail if they ever *read* a pastoral prayer and didn't just speak it from their hearts.

Those of us who said we preferred our prayers written out, argued: *what if you forget to say something? Structured prayers can cover it all.*

In our text today, Jesus does indicate there are certain things we should be sure to include in our prayers, whether they are written out or not. Jesus offers a skeleton of the Lord's Prayer, as we know it, then two examples.

My Dad told me something once about having a college degree and getting a job. I, maybe like some of you, had a hard time deciding, "what I wanted to be when I grew up," and really didn't care much about college when I was 19 years old.

My dad owned his own company, and he told me that when he was hiring a new person, it was not so much that this person had a degree in this field or that, but the fact that they had a degree at all. It indicated to him a sense of —and this is his word—*stick-to-it-tive-ness*. Someone who was willing to stick out those boring introduction courses, someone who was willing to write a paper on Shakespeare, when English Literature had absolutely nothing to do with the job they would end up having.

I think that *stick-to-it-tive-ness* was something Jesus was trying to tell the disciples in his parable about the man knocking and knocking on his neighbor's door for some bread for the stranger.

Doing God's work can be really rather difficult at times. God calls us to do some things that are hard for us, and we would really rather not do—especially when we don't see any immediate results. Oh, we start out enthusiastic, and excited to have a part in God's kingdom, to work with Jesus in changing the world. Then, when things don't happen or we get tired, it's really easy to give up. It's easy to become discouraged.

Jesus tells us in verse 10, “to ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.” When you think about that, how in the world could Jesus say such a thing? How can any thinking person make sense out of that?

If that were true, every little girl who dreamed of being a princess would be a princess. Every teenage boy who longed for a date with the head cheerleader would be going steady with the cheerleader. Every battered woman would no longer be hit or be abused. Grieving parents who lost a child would be given their child back. This is a bold statement for Jesus to make.

Well, the first thing we notice when we look carefully at what Jesus said to his disciples in verse 11, was that Jesus did *not* say “Ask and you will get what you ask for.” It more closely translates to “ask and you will receive something good.”

The second thing to note is that there is something lost in this in the translation from the Greek. The Greek New Testament does not say, “ask and you will receive.” It says aaaaaaaask, and keep on asking. . . seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. The Greek verb implies ongoing action. It means to be persistent and it means both shamelessness and boldness.

Jesus' lesson to the disciples on prayer was not necessarily about technique, you see. It wasn't about having to bow your head, or close your eyes. It was about phrasing or even how to persuade God to do something we want. It is about persistence—about being bold and shameless in asking, in seeking, in knocking on God's door—even at midnight when we think God may be sleeping!

Effective prayer is constant prayer. It was out of his own constant prayer life that Jesus gives us this lesson on prayer today.

Effective prayer is a continual connection to God. If you look closely to today's reading, you'll notice Jesus telling us that effective prayer is not about what **getting what we want** from God, it is about what we **receiving what God offers**. There is a big difference!

I'll bet most of you have experienced that—what you wanted from God, and what you received were two different things. There is a saying that says, “prayer does not give us what we want, but helps us to want what we need.”

Someone once said that God answers prayer in four ways: Yes, No, Wait, and Are you Kidding?! That may sound a bit glib, but I think there is some truth to that statement. I think sometimes we may get a “no9t,” or an “are you kidding” answer confused with no answer at all.

I have gone through periods of my life when I was an avid journalist. I would write my thoughts and prayers in my journal every day—sometimes several time a day. One of my favorite things to do is to go back and read my journals from two or three years ago. It is amazing to read and uncover all the answered prayers! Those prayers I prayed so fervently, those prayers which I thought, at the time were going unanswered *had* been answered—at a later time—and I hadn't even realized it.

You see, sometimes prayers don't change the *things* we want changed. Many times, it's **people—it's you and I** that are changed.

The Bible points to many instances of seemingly unanswered prayer. The Apostle Paul prayer hard for God to take the thorn from his side. God did not take the thorn, but God changed Paul and led Paul to do great things for God.

Jesus cried to God just before his crucifixion from the garden of Gethsemane to "take this cup from me"—God did not, and look how that so called unanswered prayer changed you and me.

Do we always get what we pray for? No. Does God always answer our prayers in the way we want them answered? No. Does God always hear our prayers? Yes.

So what do we get for all our praying? **What we get is GOD.** Peter Annet once said that those who pray persistently—those who ask and seek and knock and keep on knocking are like sailors who have cast anchor on a rock. As they pull on the anchor, they think they are pulling the rock to themselves, but they are really pulling themselves to the rock.

This is what persistent prayer does. It pulls us closer to The Rock, to God Almighty. And, as we move closer to God in prayer, we find that we do not get what we always want from God. We get something better. We get what we need. We get what God wants for us. We find that as we move closer to God we begin to desire what God desires, so that what we ask for, knock for, and seek after becomes what God so desperately wants to give us.

Then, the truth of Jesus' words come to life that what we pray for we truly do receive. Amen.