

# Enjoying the Fatherhood of God

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PART 2

Matthew 7:7-11 (*parallel* Luke 11:9-13)

“We honor God when we ask for great things. It is humiliating to think we are satisfied with very small results.” - D. L. Moody

To what type of God do we pray? Is He one who plays games with us, fooling us with false intentions? Is He the type that will place hidden strings on His answers to manipulate us later? Has He chosen to be so far removed from our everyday lives that He cannot relate to our need? Is He even interested?

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to the “Father”, “the Heavenly Father”, or “the Father who is in heaven” no less than fifteen times. He encourages His followers to live according to the will of the Father and confirm they are His children. “...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who spitefully use you that you may be the children of the Father which is in heaven...Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:44-48).<sup>1</sup>

As God’s children, they are to worship Him and pray to Him honestly and secretly. “Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen of them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven...when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving is in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you...But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans...for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (6:1-4, 6-8).

He also reminds them that they can trust their Heavenly Father to supply their needs. “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they...your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things...” (6:26, 32).

Our Lord teaches His disciples that God is their heavenly Father, a concept that they could count on. These same truths are available to us as well, and they invite us to acknowledge and live under the fatherhood of God.

## *The Promise*

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened (Matthew 7:7-8).*

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.

This is a significant promise, and it is discovered by pursuing life through pursuing God in prayer. We will receive if we ask. In our asking of God, we are pursuing His will, believing this is a means for the child of God to know it. When we pray, we “knock” to be invited in. What has been perceived as being closed to us, we want to experience. When we pray, we have an open path to greater opportunities (“open door”) within the will of God.

Jesus Christ promises that we *will* receive and we *will* find an open door through prayer. Therefore, we may approach life with the confidence our loving Father will supply (Matthew 6:31-32).

### *The Discovery*

Seeking, however, is somewhat different. Perhaps this is splitting theological hairs, but I suggest that this concept identifies our investment in praying. We act in prayer by asking and knocking, and our responsibility is seeking. On the one hand we ask and knock, but on the other hand, we must be actively living out our lives with sensitivity to discovering the will of the Father. God answers the prayers of His children of faith in conjunction with their anticipation of discovering *His answer* rather than *their perceived best answer*. We do not sit back waiting for the answer to come as we would want it, nor should we think it will fall in our lap.

When we pray, we pray with our eyes open, so to speak. The Heavenly Father would not want us to pray blind, never discovering His answers. That would hinder the relationship. I used to believe that we might not ever know some of the answers to some of our prayers because God works in such ways that we might not see them. I do not believe that any more. I am convinced that God wants us to discover His answers, because Jesus asserts that prayer is supposed to have an answer. It is in prayer and its answer that the interchange of love between the Father and His child takes place.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, we might find His answer through the Word of God. As we read devotionally, God’s Spirit may impress upon us Heaven’s answer or expand our faith in order to grasp His answer. The truth of the matter is that we pray for things that God has already promised, and therefore, given an answer to. In other words, the answers are already promised in His Word.

As we relate to others – family, friends, colleagues – God’s Spirit may convince us of His Will. As we watch the world and its struggles, God’s Spirit may prompt us to additional action as His answer for us. As we work and play, situations may change where we notice the Hand of God at work. In any number of ways, God may reveal His answer, and we must seek after them.

### *The Evaluation*

What do you do when there is no perceptible answer? First, remember that God is attentive and responds like a father, so we are the variable in praying, not Him. We may have asked, sought, or knocked wrongly when we cannot perceive an answer. You might consider the prayer was improper, centered in self or demanding of God what is inconsistent with His will or promises. The assumption of Jesus’ teaching is that the asking and the knocking are done to a holy God, acknowledging His loving nature, so it would be foolish to ask or knock in order to use Him for your own ends.

Secondly, when a sense of spiritual void follows your praying, it may be an indication that you may be looking for the wrong answer, seeking to discover the answer in the wrong way, or even looking for

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<sup>2</sup> Murray, Andrew, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, (Pennsylvania: Whitaker House) 1981.

the answer too soon. For instance, if you are praying but are not studying the Word of God, then you have limited your ability to “hear” God’s answer. If you are praying and not allowing yourself to fellowship and interact with believers, you have limited God’s working in you. If you are praying and not continuing to act to solve your need, then you have forsaken your responsibility in the relationship. Your faith may have to grow before you can “see” the answer; hence, the delay. Perhaps you have harbored some sin that has not yet been confessed. Most often, our difficulties and that from which we need release are actually the consequences of our own doing. We choose poorly and we reap the whirlwind. Confession, then, is appropriate in this instance, and renewed commitment to obedience to the Father is crucial.

Make no mistake about it, God has answered, or He will answer. That truth is set; it will not change. Then, do not sit down in resignation believing God has not heard you, and do not ever allow yourself to believe that God will not answer you. These answers and blessings of the Father are dependent upon our individual need, our individual level of spirituality, and the Will of the Father. God gives what is appropriate, according to our faith ability, and according to His wisdom.

### *The Assurance*

*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:9-11)*

Our Lord removes our doubt and hesitation about praying by showing us the sure ground upon which His teaching is given; namely the fatherhood of God. Similar to an earthly father caring for his children to give them appropriate gifts, so the Heavenly Father gives to His children of faith special gifts. What seem to be drastic comparisons in the above scripture and its parallel in Luke 11:12 are actually deceptive similarities (Note: the Lucan text adds “if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?”).

The stones on the seashore looked much like small loaves of bread, but a father would never think stones would provide nourishment. The reference to a snake actually meant an eel. In the Jewish law, creatures from the sea without scales could not be eaten. In fact, it was an abomination to the Lord, so a father would not give his child something inappropriate. When the scorpion sleeps its tail and claws fold under its body, and it appears much like an egg.<sup>3</sup> No loving father would ever be that deceptive and cruel to give a gift that would harm his child.

Our Father is not cruel in His dealings with us nor is He deterred from answering His children. The gifts of the Heavenly Father will not hurt us. His answers to our prayers will not appear to be one thing and then surprise us as being something else. He will not mock us as we pray because His supply will be always according to His wisdom and love. In fact, the Heavenly Father’s manner of giving is greater than that of an earthly parent. “How much more!” Christ says, “will the Heavenly Father give...” He has greater resources and sees the real need upon the backdrop of the entire lives of His children rather than just a moment in time.

Therefore, to pray asking, seeking, knocking is to pray in dependency not sufficiency. Our pursuits of life and our pursuit of God are dependent endeavors because we are assured God is willing to answer and respond to His children. “Don’t think you have to figure out a way to wrench a blessing from

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<sup>3</sup> Barclay, William, *The Daily Study Bible Series*, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press) 1975.

Him, some how to trick Him into giving up what He would rather keep for Himself. God's word teaches that God loves to bestow blessings upon His children. It's His nature; it's who He is." <sup>4</sup> With these truths asserted, we are able to pursue God and discover His will because we are assured of His love for us.

### *The Journey*

There is one other concept worth noting. The three words, "ask", "seek", "knock" are in a form in the Greek text that requires each one to be translated as continuous action. In other words, "Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking" with the assurance that you will receive of the Lord. Christ calls us to persevere in prayer. Our ongoing relationship with the Heavenly Father assures us that every aspect of our living is called into this relationship. Every situation that comes our way is promised to be met by the Father's provision, if we but ask, seek, and knock. What wonderful news! I believe that's why Paul would write, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Trusting faith and persevering prayer steady every step of faith's journey. There will be turns and adjustments all along the way, but a child of God is always heard and assured of an answer from the Father according to His wisdom and love. Father-like giving is the result of child-like living. Therefore, you must honor the Father with this type of continuing trust, and as you do, you will discover prayer is a life-long response to and enjoyment in the fatherhood of God.

Like a child leaping to her father's arms without a thought of his strength to catch her, so are we in our faith journey. Trust never doubts.

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<sup>4</sup> Hybels, Bill, *Too Busy Not to Pray*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press) 1998.