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Sermon: October 13, 2013  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“ASK, SEEK, KNOCK”**

Luke 11:1-13

■ Luke 11, verses 9-10: **“I tell you: 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; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.”**

But what about the believer who asks, pleads, implores God for a job, or healing, or rescue from danger – yet **“it”** is not **“given”**?

What about the disciple of Jesus who seeks, searches, and hunts for a true friend, or a mate, or a way out of an unbearable situation – yet they do not **“find”**?

What about the Christ Follower who knocks, thumps, bangs on the door of heaven in dire need or desperate yearning – yet **“the door”** is not **“opened”**?

I am talking about the person who comes in genuine faith, true knowledge, and heartfelt devotion – and the Living God clearly says *No* – or maybe *Wait awhile* or, harder still, he answers with silence.

○ {Ps 22:1-2} Some days I feel like bellowing...

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from the words of my groaning?  
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not  
answer, by night, but I find no rest.**

○ {Mt 27:46} It is OK! Holy God canonized these words as Scripture, and his Son shouted the first line **“in a loud voice”** in front of a large audience.

Nevertheless the Messiah, who *knew* he would suffer God-forsakenness on the cross, bids us to **“Ask ... seek and knock,”** with the relevant promises.

? *What does he mean?*

? *How shall we live within the tension between God’s promise and God’s silence?*

□ Please turn with me to Luke 11:1-13.

■ Verse 1: **“One day Jesus [is] praying... When he [finishes], one of his disciples [says] to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’”**

The disciples already pray multiple times a day; only the most irreligious Jews do not. They have got the customary postures and phrases down pat and, for the most part, Jesus uses the same ones.

But his prayers are intimate, lively, humble, bold, and expectant. It is as though the Master stands face-to-face with YHWH, naked before his holiness, majesty, and power, yet unashamed. Jesus radiates pure reverence, but without even a hint of dread.

The Twelve want what he has, so one of them asks, **“Lord, teach us to pray.”**

Maybe they hope to learn a new and improved *method* of praying, a better technique that will make them superior prayer warriors. It sounds good, doesn’t it? We are all about foolproof steps and well-oiled machines.

The Lord does teach them a form of prayer, but he does not get bogged down in methodology.

Maybe they expect to learn a sacred *formula*, the right words spoken in the right order to achieve the right results. It sounds crass, I know; but let's be honest: don't we sometimes think of prayer as an incantation? I prayed A, B, C, so God is going to deliver X, Y, Z!

There is none of that here. The Lord has no magic words to give them.

■ Jesus begins to answer by teaching them the Lord's Prayer in verses 2-4:

**“When you pray, say:**

**‘Father, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come.**

**Give us each day our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive  
everyone who sins against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation.”**

This is not quite what is printed in the worship folder, is it? The version we recite is from Matthew 6:9-13. During his public ministry Christ taught many things more than once, with some variations.

■ Next, in verses 5-8, Jesus tells the story of a man who knocks on his friend's door at midnight and asks for bread. The man inside would rather not to be bothered, but **“even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.”**

A lot of people draw a false correlation between God and the homeowner, as though God does not want to be disturbed. In fact, Jesus is saying the exact opposite: God *delights* in responding to us. If even a sleepy man will get up out of his cozy bed in order to help a rude friend, how much more will God (who neither slumbers nor sleeps) respond to us?

■ In verses 9-10 Jesus follows that up with: **“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; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.”**

■ And then, in verses 11-13, he concludes with more encouragement: **“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”**

There is only a little technique here, and no magic formula. There are some principles that can help us to wrestle fruitfully with our questions about prayer.

⊗ Principle 1) Prayer is, first and foremost, a relational activity.

Did you notice all the relational vocabulary in our text? The Lord starts his model prayer by addressing God as **“Father.”** **“When you pray, say: ‘Father.’”**

The parable of the petitioner is brief, but in it Jesus repeats the word **“friend”** four times: 1) **“Suppose you have a friend”**; 2) you **“say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves...’**; 3) **“a friend of mine on a journey”**; and 4) **“he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship”** (the Greek literally reads, **“on account of his being his friend”**).

And in verses 11-13 we have: **“you fathers,” “your son,” “your children,”** and **“your Father in heaven.”**

God often gives us answers in prayer, but prayer is not primarily a 4-1-1- line. God often helps us in prayer, but prayer is not primarily a tech support line. God often calms us down in prayer, but prayer is not primarily a crisis hot line. God often rescues us in prayer, but prayer is not primarily a 9-1-1 line.

Prayer is all about relationship. It is a gathering place, a meeting ground, a forum for personal interaction with the Living God.

The LORD’s paramount purpose in prayer is to be present with us, to draw near to us, to commune with us. Any dissonant attitude, mindset or agenda that we bring into prayer will hinder our prayer life.

I am not saying that if we **“ask and it”** isn’t **“given,”** **“seek and”** don’t **“find,”** **“knock and the door”** isn’t **“opened,”** it is proof we have sinned.

○ {Lk 22:44} By no means! The sinless Son of God pleaded so earnestly for rescue **“his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”** His Father said, **“No.”** {Mt 27:46} In his anguish on the cross Jesus **“cried out... ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”** His Father was silent.

The Living God has any number of reasons to answer with a booming *No!* or a deafening silence. Sometimes it has nothing to do with sin.

However God answers: *Yes, No, Wait,* or with silence, it is always to achieve his top priority: right relationship with us.

✧ Principle 2) Prayer establishes the deity of the triune God in our lives. It affirms his Lordship.

**“When you pray say... ‘Hallowed be your name.’”** Not my name; *your* Name, O God!

**“When you pray say... ‘Your kingdom come.’”** Not my personal kingdom, not our American kingdom, not even our church kingdom; *your* kingdom, O God!

**“When you pray say... ‘Give us each day our daily bread.’”** Yes, we work, but our minds, bodies, abilities, skills, and worthy opportunities are gifts to us. We are not self-made; we depend on you, O God!

**“When you pray say ... ‘Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.’”** We do not insist on sovereignty usurp your role as Judge, O God!

And so on.

We **“ask”** the Lord, for he is the Eternal, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Holy, Majestic Creator and Ruler of the Universe.

We **“seek”** the Lord, for he is the Giver of life, the Redeemer of our souls, and the Sustainer of our being.

We **“knock”** for admission to the Lord’s presence, for we need him as a drowning man needs oxygen, as a

parched woman needs water, as a starving child needs sustenance.

Prayer establishes the deity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our lives. It enables us to surrender to his Lordship whether he answers *Yes*, *No*, *Wait* or with silence.

⊗ Principle 3) Prayer is an opportunity for us to seek and receive the best from God.

**“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish will give him a snake...? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?”**

**“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts...how much more will your Father in heaven give...!”**

God is bighearted and openhanded. He is extravagantly generous. He delights in giving.

Some people stop there, and so it makes sense that they hear this as a blanket guarantee of non-stop health, wealth, and happiness.

But that isn't where the Lord Jesus stops. What he says is: **“how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”**

We settle for the good, or even the OK. What is more, once we develop a taste for the mediocre, we actually prefer it to the best. But the LORD insists on giving only the best – himself, his indwelling Spirit.

That helps to explain why God often says *“No”* to our petitions. We assume we want the best when, in reality, getting what we ask for would prevent us from receiving the best God has to give.

Could it be that the LORD answers *“Yes”* to our plea for healing when healing will open us up to more of his Holy Spirit and *“No”* when it will not? Could it be that he answers *“Yes”* to our request for provision when provision will open us to more of him and *“No”* when it will not?

○ {Jas 4:2-3} James pointedly observes, **“You do not have because you do not ask God. When you [do] ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”**

However God answers: *Yes*, *No*, *Wait*, or with silence, it is always to create the possibility for us to seek and receive his very best.

**“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; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.”**

This is the Word of the Lord.