

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



The Key to Answered Prayer

KEY PASSAGE: Matthew 7:7-11 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:8, 33 | John 11:1-44; 14:6 | James 4:3

SUMMARY

One of the primary reasons God answers prayer is because He wants us to get to know Him.

Through answered prayer, we learn about His love, timing, wisdom, goodness, and awesome power. His faithfulness to provide prompts us to trust Him on a deeper level. Instead of focusing primarily on petitions for ourselves or others, we begin to value spending time alone with our heavenly Father. And as we grow in intimacy with Him, we may even find ourselves receiving unexpected blessings—things we never even requested.

But how should we respond when God doesn't seem to be answering our prayers at all? Perhaps you have been asking Him to meet a pressing need or grant a particular desire, yet nothing seems to be happening. In circumstances like these, you and I often rationalize that the Lord isn't listening or doesn't care. As a result, we often stop praying too soon. But Scripture teaches that the Father delights in giving His children good things. In Matthew, Jesus promised, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (7:7-8). Within this passage is the key to answered prayer: God responds when His children seek His face with perseverance and confidence.

SERMON POINTS

If we want God to answer our prayers, we must . . .

- **Pray with perseverance.** What did Jesus mean when He told His followers to "seek" and "knock"?

He was inviting us as believers to approach the Father freely with our petitions, fully expecting Him to provide all we need. However, He never promised that every door would open immediately. On the contrary, in telling us to "seek" and "knock," Jesus used a Greek verb form called present imperative. These two verbs are best translated as "knock, and keep on knocking" or "seek, and keep on seeking." In other words, perseverance is a vital aspect of answered prayer. Some of the gifts God has for us come only after long seasons of waiting and praying.

It's important to understand that the Father always responds to our prayers—but those answers can take one of three forms. He may say "yes" immediately or within a short period of time. This helps motivate us to know and trust Him more. By responding quickly to our prayers, God opens our eyes to how faithful He'll be with other needs brought before Him.

Another answer is "wait." We may be asking for the right thing but aren't quite prepared for His answer. He may be quietly arranging the circumstances before granting our request. Whenever you sense that the Lord is saying "wait," take a look within yourself. Ask Him to reveal any wrong motives or incorrect perspectives that might be contributing to the delay (James 4:3). God is always faithful to let us know anything that might be hindering His answer. Persevering in prayer gives the Father the opportunity to work within us and our circumstances.

A third way God responds is with "I have something better." This may sound like "no" to some, but I like to think of it in a positive light. The Father knows your needs and desires, and He truly

wants to meet them. However, He promises to give only what is good. This means He will sometimes withhold what we want if it is not His best for our lives. Most of us can look back on things we asked for in the past and be grateful that God did not grant every request. Nonetheless, we should keep praying—at the right time, the Lord will meet our desires in the most satisfying way possible.

■ **Pray with confidence.** Confidence in prayer is belief in the trustworthiness of God. We must trust that He will provide for our needs. To illustrate this point, Jesus referred to a typical relationship between a father and son. A parent would never give a child a stone if the boy asked for bread, nor would he give a snake when asked for a fish (Matt. 7:9-11). In a similar way, our heavenly Father can be trusted to give us gifts that are beneficial in every way.

Sometimes people pray for something and are determined to get it—whether or not God gives it to them. They become impatient, run ahead of Him, and make a big mistake by trying to get what they want on their own. However, when God has us wait, He always has a purpose for it.

Think about how Mary and Martha waited while Lazarus was dying (John 11:1-44). Jesus had spent a great deal of time with this family, including eating with them in their home. The sisters expected Him to come quickly when He heard Lazarus was at the point of death. Instead, He waited until their brother had died. At first, Jesus' delay did not seem good to Mary and Martha, but what was the end result? The Savior did something better than heal Lazarus; He raised him from the dead. To this day, we are talking about this miracle that proved Jesus' power over death. It's always best to wait on God's perfect timing.

There have been a number of occasions when the Lord asked me to wait for no apparent reason. One time, when my car was destroyed by a collision, He asked me to postpone buying a replacement. Eventually, a church member

gave me a check for a far nicer automobile than I would have bought on my own. Another time, God told me to wait on buying a home. Feeling pressure to settle on a property, I entered into a contract anyway. In His mercy, the basement of the house flooded that very night, giving me a legitimate reason for getting out of the contract. He provided an easy way for me to return to His perfect will for my life.

Of course, the Lord doesn't always provide a second chance for us to obey Him. That's why we are wise to submit to His will the first time around. If we are willing to pray with confidence, waiting on the Father's timing, we will find that He was preparing the very best for us all along.

RESPONSE

■ Is there something you've been asking God for but have yet to receive? If so, do not be discouraged. Persist in prayer, confident that He is preparing something special for you. Let Him work in your heart and circumstances. Perhaps He'll soon provide exactly what you are requesting, or maybe you will be surprised with a far better gift. Whatever His response, it's sure to be incredible.

Your heavenly Father enjoys giving to you because He loves you and wants you to experience intimacy with Him—the best gift anyone will ever have.

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