



Ask, Search, Knock

Luke 11:1-13

"So I say to 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; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

July 24, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Scriptures - Genesis 18:20-32 • Colossians 2: 12-14 • Luke 11:1-13

I imagine that in the lives of many of us there are certain personal practices or long-standing ways of living that are either instinctive or that we have learned from others. These habits are meant to support: the way we live our life, what we consider important, what we hold dear. Many of us, I suspect, don't give much thought to these practices; they are simply behaviors we have learned and that give our lives a certain strength or predictability.

Many of these may also help us get along smoothly from day to day. Others, however, may have a deep, almost theological or spiritual character; they give meaning to the way we experience life in its deepest sense. To find this quietness of mind or soul, some folks practice meditation, reflection, silence or even yoga!

But for many of us, prayer, in the traditional sense of that word, is the "tool" we use to give meaning to our daily existence. We pray because we have the sense that our life depends upon God. So, in our own personal way we speak to God to whom our life depends.

Without attempting to identify the countless, personal ways individuals may choose to pray, let's just search the Scriptures to discover what our ancestors have found helpful.

First, we go to the Book of Genesis where we find the story of the corrupt cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, the father of faith and nations, had a special love for those two cities; so despite their moral decline he wanted to see if he could talk God out of his wrath.

Therefore the famous debate with God begins: "Let's say, Lord God" Abraham insists, "that there are one hundred or fifty, twenty five or even two morally righteous individuals in those towns, would you still be determined to wipe them off the map?" "Well," God says, "if at least one such person is found, maybe not; let's give them another chance to reform, ok?" "Done" says Abraham. So, here is a great

story about prayer and persistence that succeeded!

What can we learn: from that story? Ideally, prayer should be on a *first name* basis, i.e., a personal conversation with God. Any other form of prayer will turn out to be pure formality. Secondly, if we are in a *one-to-one relationship* with God, let's just be blunt and express exactly what's on our mind, what is important to us; moreover let's also not give up after the first request. Repetition is for our own advantage, not for God; God already knows what's on our mind.

Next we turn to the passage in Luke's gospel where Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them to pray. "It's simple," Jesus replies. "Just call God Father and then tell God what happens to be on your mind; tell God what is important in your life: bread, cheese, wine and peace, for instance. Then don't forget to let God know that you are far from perfect and that you do not deserve any of this; then ask forgiveness. It's all that simple," Jesus insists.

Finally, let's look and see how some contemporary Christians pray: First, from Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk: *"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going...but ... I will trust you always even though I seem to be lost. I am convinced that you will never leave me to face my perils alone."* That surely, is a prayer anyone can pray without the help of theology.

And this from Reinhold Niebuhr, Protestant theologian: *"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the strength to change the things I can change and the wisdom to know the difference."* Interestingly, both of those prayers sound very much like the Lord's Prayer.

Ideally, I suppose it's easier to simply find someone else's prayer and pray it, but it will probably not be our prayer, a prayer that comes from our heart.

Like the apostles, we may find ourselves asking Jesus to teach us how to pray. If the response we hear is simply: "Just call God Father." Then we are already halfway home.

Happy Birthday - Clark (7/29)

Prayer Thought – Guatemala

For love of you and all creation; O God, may our lives reflect your joy, hope, love and peace. Forgive us when we have denied our role in sharing your love with others. As we recognize the gift of your grace, may we be generous in sharing that gift with others.

We uphold the people of Guatemala and seek for all your blessing of peace. Guide and sustain all who work for justice and peace within and beyond their nations' borders.

We praise you for your Holy Spirit, which sustains us in times of need. Guide us as we strive to be your presence of healing and peace in our world.

For your love and your grace we give thanks, O God of peace. Amen.

One in Christ Moment

Ask - Seek – Knock

First, Jesus tells them to ask. This is the prayer part. It is taking our requests and needs to God, and presenting them before Him. It is not that He is unaware of our needs, for He knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt 6:8).

Just as we talk over the issues of our day with our spouse or friends, so also God wants us to communicate with Him about the issues and needs which are heavy on our hearts and minds. So, we ask Him about these things. This is the first step to prayer.

But after we ask, we don't simply keep asking. We must begin to seek. This is the second step. Seeking is when we look around for how God might answer our prayers. After we ask God for something, the next thing we must do is start looking around with eyes of faith for how God might be providing answers to the issues we discussed with Him.

Seeking answers to our prayers leads to the third step in getting our prayers answered: knocking. After we ask God to help us with our needs, and as we seek for possible ways that God might answer our requests, we must then step out in faith and knock on the doors that present themselves. When we ask, we ask with faith. When we seek, we seek possible answers with eyes of faith. And when we knock, we step out and take risks with faith by pursuing opportunities that were brought to our attention during the seeking phase.

Sometimes the first door we knock on is the one that opens, but this is usually not the case. Sometimes we have to knock on ten, fifty, even hundreds of doors. For this reason, the knocking phase is often the most difficult, but it is here that perseverance is vitally important if we are going to see answers to our prayers.

Want to see more answers to prayer? Don't just ask God for things. Step out and seek ways that He might answer them, and then knock on the doors of opportunity that are presented. In this way, praying is more than just asking God for things and then sitting around, waiting for Him to respond.