

ASKING AND RECEIVING

TEXT: JAMES 4:1-3; 5:15-20

Introduction:

1. One of the most fascinating statements in the Bible is found in James 4:2 -- "ye have not, because ye ask not."
2. Many Christians miss out on the manifold blessings of God simply because they do not ask.
3. Our Lord said in Matthew 7:7, 8, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."
4. Our Lord said in Matthew 6:8, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."
5. And even though our Lord already knows what we need, He still wants us to ask. This is an important principle of prayer. Isaiah 65:24 says, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."
6. God has created this universe in such a way that it runs according to certain principles and laws that He has established.
 7. I am going to preach on the law of asking and receiving.
8. There are certain laws regarding prayer, that if carefully followed will result in the joy of having our prayers answered. But if these laws are ignored, we miss out on God's blessings -- "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2; cf. Matthew 7:7-11).
9. Our Lord said in Matthew 21:22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."
10. Our Lord said in John 14:14, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."
11. Our Lord said in John 16:24, "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."
12. God has established these principles for prayer, and our prayers must be according to the way God has set things up.

I. PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER

1. These principles are very clear and easy to understand (James 4:2, 3; 5:13-20; Luke 11:5-13).
2. Notice the request was for bread (Luke 11:5). Our Lord refers to bread, fish, and an egg (11:11, 12). Food is a necessity.

3. Are we praying for necessary things, or are we "asking amiss" (James 4:3). The climax of our Lord's discourse on prayer in Luke 11 was reached when He disclosed the Father's promise to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him (Luke 11:13).
4. The Lord wants us to understand that our urgent and fervent prayer requests are answered by the Father's gift of the fulness of the Holy Spirit.
5. In the 19th century, the great evangelist Charles Finney wrote a book entitled *Principles of Prayer*.
6. In his memoirs, Finney wrote that during his revival efforts he spoke to Christians and "endeavored to make them understand that God would answer prayer, provided they fulfilled the conditions upon which He had promised to answer prayer; and especially if they believed, in the sense of expecting Him to answer their requests."
7. That last statement is very important -- "especially if they believed, in the sense of expecting Him to answer their requests."
8. James 1:5-7 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."
9. "But let him ask in faith..." (1:6). This is a very important principle of prayer.
10. Hudson Taylor, the missionary to inland China, understood the principles of asking and receiving. Here is an example from his biography, *Hudson Taylor in Early Years*, Volume 1, written by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor.

On one occasion when we were in dangerous proximity to the north of New Guinea. Saturday night had brought us to a point some thirty miles off the land, and during the Sunday morning service which was held on deck I could not fail to see that the Captain looked troubled and frequently went over to the side of the ship. When the service was ended I learnt from him the cause a four-knot current was carrying us toward some sunken reefs, and we were already so near that it seemed improbable that we should get through the afternoon in safety. After dinner the long-boat was put out and all hands endeavoured, without success, to turn the ship's head from the shore. After standing together on the deck for some time in silence, the Captain said to me "Well, we have done everything that can be done. We can only await the result."

A thought occurred to me, and I replied, "No, there is one thing we have not done yet."

"What is that?" he queried.

"Four of us on board are Christians. Let us each retire to his own cabin, and in agreed prayer ask the Lord to give us immediately a breeze. He can as easily send it now as at sunset."

The Captain complied with this proposal. I went and spoke to the other two men, and after prayer with the carpenter we all four retired to wait upon God. I had a good but very brief season in prayer, and then felt so satisfied that our request was granted that I could not continue asking, and very soon went up again on deck. The first officer, a godless man, was in charge. I went over and asked him to let down the corners of the mainsail, which had been drawn up in order to lessen the useless flapping of the sail against the rigging, "What would be the good of that?" he answered roughly.

I told him we had been asking a wind from God ; that it was coming immediately; and we were so near the reef by this time that there was not a minute to lose.

With an oath and a look of contempt, he said he would rather see a wind than hear of it, But while he was speaking I watched his eye, following it up to the royal, and there sure enough the corner of the topmost sail was beginning to tremble in the breeze.

"Don't you see the wind is coming? Look at the royal!" I exclaimed.

"No, it is only a cat's paw," he rejoined (a mere puff of wind).

"Cat's paw or not," I cried, "pray let down the mainsail and give as the benefit."

This he was not slow to do. In another minute the heavy tread of the men on deck brought up the Captain from his cabin to see what was the matter. The breeze had indeed come! In a few minutes we were ploughing our way at six or seven knots an hour through the water ...and though the wind was sometimes unsteady we did not altogether lose it until after passing the Pelew Islands.

Thus God encouraged me ere landing on China's shores to bring every variety of need to Him in prayer, and to expect that He would honour the name of the Lord Jesus and give the help each emergency required.

11. Faith is essential in asking and receiving. Our Lord said in Matthew 21:22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

12. Some Christians do not get their prayers answered because they really do not believe God can answer or that He will answer their prayers.

13. James 1:6, 7 says, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."
14. Some do not get their prayers answered simply because they do not ask. James 4:2 says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not."
15. Then James says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (4:3).
16. The word translated "lust" in James 4:3 does not have the meaning we usually think of. It means, "so that you may consume it on your worldly pleasures."
17. That is asking "amiss" (4:3).
18. Some Christians are not obedient, and that is why they do not get their prayers answered. First John 3:22 says, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."
19. This brings me to my next point.

II. WHY SOME PRAYERS ARE UNANSWERED

1. The Bible gives several reasons why certain prayers remain unanswered. Sometimes we "ask amiss" (James 4:3).
2. In the Bible, we never read of people asking God for foolish things. The Syro-Phoenician woman had a my daughter who was grievously vexed with a devil (Matt. 15:22).
3. The Roman centurion had a servant, who was sick of the palsy and grievously tormented (Matt. 8:6).
4. The apostle Paul prayed that the Christians in Ephesus would be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ (Eph. 1:17).
5. In fact, most of Paul's prayers were like that.
6. Sometimes we do not expect God to answer our prayers, and therefore He doesn't answer them.
7. Sometimes we give up and stop praying right before the prayer was about to be answered. This is why our Lord said to "ask, seek, and knock" (Luke 11:1-13).
8. R.A. Torrey said, "We find right here why it is that many prayers fail to accomplish that which we seek from God. We pray and pray and pray, and are almost up to the verge of the attainment of that for which we are praying, and right then, when God is just about to answer the prayer, we stop and miss the blessing."

9. Torrey prayed fifteen years for his brother to get saved. He said, "I prayed fifteen long years for the conversion of my oldest brother. When he seemed to be getting farther and farther away from any hope of conversion, I prayed on. My first winter in Chicago, after fifteen years of praying, never missing a single day, one morning God said to me as I knelt, 'I have heard your prayer. You need not pray anymore; your brother is going to be converted.'
10. "Within two weeks he was in my home, shut in with sickness which made it impossible for him to leave my home for two weeks. Then the day he left he accepted Christ over in the Bible Institute in Mr. Moody's office, where he and I went to talk and pray together. I told this incident when holding meetings in a certain city. An elderly woman came at the close of the meeting and said, 'I have been praying for the conversion of my brother, who is sixty-three years old, for many years; but a short time ago I gave up and stopped praying.' She added, 'I am going to begin my prayers again.' Within two weeks of that time she came and said, 'I have heard from my brother, and he has accepted Christ.'
11. "Oh, men and women, pray through; pray through; pray through! Do not just begin to pray and pray a little while and throw up your hands and quit; but pray and pray and pray until God bends the heavens and comes down!"
12. First Thessalonians 5:17 says we are to "pray without ceasing."
13. Romans 12:12 says, "continuing instant in prayer."
14. Our Lord commended the Syro-Phoenician woman because she kept asking till her prayer was answered (Matthew 15:28). She would not be discouraged.
15. Our Lord spoke of the persistent widow woman in Luke 18. He said in Luke 18:6 and 7, "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?"
16. Sometimes prayers go unanswered because of unconfessed sin. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."
17. But then the Psalmist goes on to say, "But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me" (66:19, 20).
18. Isaiah 59:1, 2 says, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your

iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

19. Some prayers remain unanswered because of marital problems. First Peter 3:7 says, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."

III. HOW PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED

1. We are to seek the will of God (cf. Romans 8:26, 27).
2. If we are praying according to God's will, we can have confidence our prayers will be answered (cf. I John 5:14, 15).
3. Here is how George Müller learned how to pray according to the will of God:

I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the trouble with people generally is just here. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what His will is.

Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions.

I seek the Will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them.

Next I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's Will in connection with His Word and Spirit.

I ask God in prayer to reveal His Will to me aright.

Thus, through prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly. In trivial matters, and in transactions involving most important issues, I have found this method always effective.

CONCLUSION:

1. God answers our prayers in unusual ways. I heard a fascinating story about a boy who hated to be late for school. But his parents were

always late for everything, and so one day he was late because of them.

2. His teacher at the school said, "Be sure always to be on time." So the little boy always sought to be on time when he went to school. But this day, though it wasn't his fault, he was running late.
3. And, when he walked out his door to go to school, the clock struck the time that he was to be there. Since he had a long walk from his house to the school, the little fellow bowed his head and prayed aloud, "O Lord, O Lord, don't let me be late for school!"
4. There happened to be a man nearby who overheard the boy's prayer. The man thought, "This is unthinkable. It has already struck time for the boy to be there, yet he prays, 'O God, don't let me be late for school.'" Yet out of curiosity, this man who heard that earnest prayer, followed behind the boy just to see what would happen.
5. Meanwhile over at the school, the school principal had put his key in the lock, and somehow he had turned it the wrong way. The key broke inside the lock, and he jammed the lock.
6. He couldn't get the door open, and so he called for a locksmith. And by the time the locksmith had finished repairing the lock, and opened the door, and the principal and teachers, and all the students walked in, in walked in that happy little boy, just on time!
7. He knew God heard his prayer and answered his prayer.
8. A skeptic would say it was a coincidence. I say God answers prayer, and often in unusual ways.
9. "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9).