

PINELAKE CHURCH

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

THE ROAD OF PERSISTENT PRAYER (MATTHEW 7:7-11)

NOVEMBER 18, 2012



MAIN POINT

Jesus calls us to a distinct way of life as His disciples. If we follow His teaching and calling, we will find ourselves living by a different standard, with different desires, different leaders, and a different outcome than people in the world. In the section of the Sermon on the Mount we begin today (Matt. 7:7-29), Jesus outlines five roads every true believer is called to travel. First is the road of persistent prayer. In Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus taught that true followers are to be persistent in prayer—they pray, and keep on praying without giving up. Prayer is key to experiencing the blessing and power of God in our lives.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

What is the most outlandish thing you have ever asked for as a birthday or Christmas gift?

What are some of the things you have asked God for? How has God answered?

Many times in our lives we ask for things just because we want them or we want to see if we will get them. But today, we will be reminded that beyond needs and requests, prayer is the primary way we function in relationship with God, and He wants us to continually approach Him with our requests. He delights to give us what we need.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

In Matthew 5–7, Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount to His disciples, crowds, and religious leaders. Matthew 7 is a series of short teachings where Jesus jumps from subject to subject. In verses 7 through 11 Jesus specifically teaches that our prayers are powerful when we are persistent (v. 7), when we believe God's promise (v. 8), and when we trust God's heart (vv. 9-11).

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 7:7-8.

How are asking, seeking, and knocking different?

What did Jesus say the results of these actions would be? Share an experience when you have found this to be true. Do you think there's a catch to this promise? If so, what?

Asking, seeking, and knocking are activities that should be repeated, indicating constant or persistent prayer. The command to keep asking is tied to the promise of “good things” to those who ask in verse 11. God has given us many amazing promises in His Word, but the promise of this passage seems too good to be true: If we persistently pursue God, He will not give up on us, and He’ll make us into kingdom people. When we’re in the mind-set of the kingdom, the things we ask for are the things God wants us to have—things that bring Him glory—like faith, wisdom, love, grace, strength, and so forth. Our prayers will focus less on the stuff we need and more on the relationship we need with Him.

When have you asked God for something, then later realized that it was good you didn’t get it?

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 7:9-11.

Based on these verses, why can we have confidence in God’s answers to our prayers?

Do you give your kids everything they ask for? Why or why not? How does this ideal impact your view of God?

Verses 9-10 illustrate the teaching from verses 7-8 with two examples of a father providing for his son. When we go to God in prayer, He always treats us with the same concern a good father has for his children. If we have a need, He will take care of it. Just like a father would never give his son a poisonous snake, neither will God give us anything that misaligns with His purpose and His good, whether we ask for it or not. God is our Father, and He is a good Father. He delights to give us what we need. The power of prayer doesn’t depend on the goodness of the prayer, but on the goodness of God.

What attributes of God as Father are most important to you and why?

Why is it sometimes hard to acknowledge our need for God in the role of Father?

Our view of God determines how we pray. Human fathers are not always the loving and wise providers, teachers, and examples their children need; but most of them want to be and try to be. God is the ideal Father—all-loving, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and always present with us. At the same time, He is in heaven, which tells us He is greater than we can comprehend; so we approach Him as our Father with due reverence.

What are good gifts that God gives?

Read Luke 11:13, from the parallel account of Jesus’ teaching. What additional insight does this verse give us into the good gifts from God?

Just as children should expect good gifts from their earthly parents in response to trusting requests, we can pray expectantly, knowing our Heavenly Father will give us His best. In the parallel text (Luke 11:13), Jesus promised

DISCUSSION GUIDE

the Father will “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.” God gives His children His own indwelling presence. With the Spirit’s help, we can fulfill the high standards Jesus set in verses 1-6. His presence and power assures us we can expect to receive that for which we pray.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives. Create some talking points for the group by looking at the practical implications of the lesson. Get group members to talk about the real life implications of the passage. Look at what can be applied specifically to Pinelake.

What are some of the things you typically ask for in prayer? What are some other things you think you should be praying for?

How can you alter your schedule this week to make more time for prayer?

How can our group hold each other accountable to praying faithfully and praying for the best things?

PRAY

Close your time in prayer, thank God that He answers our prayers, and that He loves us and gives us good gifts that we ask for. Pray that God would transform our prayer lives, so that our prayers would align with His character and His will. Ask God to help your group request good things. Pray for any specific needs that your group has.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up e-mail to your group with some or all of the following information:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **What parts of your prayer life match up with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7? What do you need to change to be more like Jesus’ teaching?**
 - **What are some good things that you want to see happen in Pinelake? Take those requests before God.**
 - **How do you respond if God does not answer a prayer the way that you would like? Do you think God answers prayers for your good?**
- The challenge to memorize Matthew 7:11.
- The text for next week’s sermon, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend.

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7:7-8. The principle of persistent reliance on the Father as loving provider certainly applies to all these “good things.” But Jesus probably had the disciples’ temporal needs in mind. This is the simplest, most obvious meaning, and it would further underscore Jesus’ teaching against anxiety over daily needs (6:25–34). This is Jesus’ third of four “final exhortations” (7:1–12), addressing possible misconceptions people might take away from the sermon.

Verses 7 and 8 have six symmetrically arranged verbs paired first in a triplet of commands (7:7) and then in a triplet of affirmations (7:8). There is no need to try to distinguish different kinds of activity between ask, seek, and knock. Jesus was probably using the three verbs to refer to the same activity of petitioning the Father. His use of three different verbs added emphasis to his message. This three-pronged approach, together with the fact that all three verbs are in the present tense, conveys a clear picture of persistence in prayer.

The other three verbs in 7:7 (will be given, will find, and will be opened) are in the future tense, while in 7:8 receives and finds are in the present tense, and will be opened is in the future.

With these tenses in mind, we could translate 7:7–8 as, “Keep on asking, and it will be given to you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking will continually receive, and he who keeps on seeking will continually find, and to him who keeps on knocking it will be opened.”

Some other passages on prayer (e.g., Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13–14; 15:7), emphasize the manner in which the human activity is to be conducted. Here the emphasis is on the generosity and faithfulness of the Father. There is no condition placed on the promises (as “if you believe” in 21:22). James 4:2–3 gives some reasons why prayer sometimes does not “work.” Other passages that teach persistence in prayer are Luke 11:5–8; 18:1–8.

7:9-10. Verses 9 and 10 are rhetorical questions, implying that no parent would pull such tricks on their sincere children. A stone can resemble a loaf of “bread” (4:3), and some “snakes” can resemble “fish.”

7:11. In 7:11, Jesus brought his argument of verses 9–11 to a point. Because even the most evil parents provide the basic necessities for their children, how much more can we trust the Father in heaven, who is free from sin. Jesus’ description of humans as **you... who are evil** disproves the modern concept that people are basically good. Although Jesus acknowledged that humans may perform gracious acts like providing for their children, He insisted that they do so contrary to their sinful nature. God’s gracious acts, on the other hand, express our heavenly Father’s perfect nature. (Note the assumption here of universal sinfulness; see Rom. 3:23.)