

## **“Persisting Prayer”**

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Scriptural Foundation: Matthew 7:7-11, NIV

### **Ask, Seek, Knock**

<sup>7</sup> *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

<sup>9</sup> *“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>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 good gifts to those who ask him!”*

Recently, around noon, Pastor Daniel came into my office and began poking around in the seat-cushions of my sofa. He had not explained his purpose, but by the immense powers of observation I asked him, “Did you loose something?” Daniel’s mind was entirely removed from this task as he responded, “Yes, my wedding ring.” I probed a bit further and Daniel explained that earlier in the morning, while we were having a staff prayer meeting, he had been playing with his ring during prayer and he thought that it fell off then, but that Pastor Fred was sitting next to him on the sofa and he didn’t feel like probing around the seat cushion while Pastor Fred was sitting on it. I concurred with Daniel’s earlier restraint. Daniel was back to search for his ring, but after more disassembly of my sofa cushions the lost ring was not found. Daniel left my office perplexed. I wished him well in his continued search.

About fifteen minutes later Daniel came back to my office; still in pursuit of the illusive ring. He was now convinced that the sofa held his prize possession and this time I got up from my desk to assist him. Daniel leaned the couch over on its front legs and, sure enough, we heard something inside the couch hit against the frame. I suggested that we should let gravity do its work so we turned the sofa upside down and shook it and out slipped the ring. What joy there was in the discovery!

We have to ask the question, “Why is it that Daniel didn’t say to himself, after his first failed attempt at searching for his ring, ‘I am just going to give up. The ring is lost and that is that.’” The answer, of course, is that the ring was too important to him to give up so quickly; that the ring’s value motivated him to persist in his search. If he had lost a shiny penny that day, during prayer meeting, the shiny penny would have undoubtedly still been in my sofa because he would have given up very quickly because it would have been a thing of very little worth, but, this was his wedding ring.

In this study our attention is turned to Matthew 7 and here Jesus encourages His disciples to persist in praying for those issues that are most precious to us. He urges us to ask and to keep on asking. He urges us to seek and to keep on seeking. He urges us to knock and to keep on knocking. Jesus says that in this way we will receive; in this way we will find; and in this way the door will be opened to us.

There are three points for us to consider. The first is the provision of prayer. The second is the promise of prayer. The third is the picture of prayer.

Without persistence our progress in the faith will fizzle. Without persistence our joy in God’s reward will languish. We need persistence in order to grow in Godliness and in order to grow in our walk with God through our Lord Jesus, so we take up this issue of the provision of prayer in Verse 7. Jesus says,

<sup>7</sup> *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

The Christian, the disciple of Jesus, could not be given a more encouraging word than the word that Jesus offers here in this verse, for here Jesus offers His disciples continual access to the Father’s throne; access that will never be cut off. The verbs Jesus uses, “ask”, “seek”, “knock”, are all present tense and because they are in the present tense, they carry the meaning of an on-going nature. The idea is ask and keep on asking; never stop asking. The asking would always be in the present tense; that we would always be in the state of asking. Seek and keep on seeking is always in

the present tense; that we are always in the continual state of seeking. Knock and keep on knocking; that we would always be in the spiritual state of knocking on the door of Heaven.

The provision to come into the Father's presence never ceases for the believer. The opportunity is always available, and even more so than the opportunity or the provision is an exhortation; it is command for us to communicate to God the requests of great importance to our soul.

Before we consider the meaning of this provision we have to ask the question: why did Jesus communicate this wonderful provision at this point in His message? Why does this verse appear at this point in the Sermon on the Mount? This verse is not a sermon unto itself; it is a part of a message which Jesus is communicating to us, and it is very important that we understand Jesus' purpose for the whole sermon or we will misunderstand this verse and many do misunderstand this verse.

This verse is often used by "health and wealth" preachers. This verse is used to convince parishioners of the notion that God will give us anything we ask for if we only ask in faith. If we ask for a Ferrari we will have one. If we ask for diamonds we will have them. If we ask for health and freedom from sickness we will have it, every time and always. This verse becomes, for some teachers, the idea that we have a magic lantern that if we rub in faith and believing the genie, God Himself, will come out and He must do our bidding, but this, friends, is a wrong-headed notion. It is wrong-headed all through Scripture and it is wrong-headed here in this particular message.

Why do we know that Jesus is not teaching a "name it and claim it" doctrine here? After all it says, "ask and it will be given to you". Some health-and-wealth teachers say that there is no condition. The condition is found in the context. The meaning of ask, the meaning of seek, and the meaning of knock is found in this entire sermon.

The topic of Jesus' entire message is discipleship. It is not prosperity. What does it mean to follow God? What does it mean to live a life that pleases God? What does it mean to be a worshipper? What does it mean to be one who is accepted by God and to live out that kind of life that God gives?

Jesus is teaching His disciples about the righteous life that God requires, and we know that because of what we have learned before. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says,

<sup>20</sup> *"... unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Then He goes on to describe that kind of righteousness in very practical ways. He says, for instance, in Matthew 5:21, 22,

<sup>21</sup> *"You have heard that it was said... 'Do not murder'..."* <sup>22</sup> *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother (angry enough to say)... 'You fool!' (you have broken that commandment to not murder)."*

He says, in Matthew 5:27, 28, that anyone who looks at a woman with an unhealthy desire or with an immoral thought has broken the commandment "Do not commit adultery".

He says, "Furthermore, let's talk about honesty and let's talk about what it means to keep your word. If you ever make a promise and you do not fulfill it that is a sin against Heaven and it is living a life that God is displeased with." (Matthew 5:33-37)

He goes on to say, "Let us talk about when people do you wrong, you enemies and people who have hurt and have done so on purpose, and the resentment and the bitterness that can build up against such a person. I tell you this – love your enemies and do good to them." (Matthew 5:43-47)

At the end of Chapter 5, after giving these illustrations, He says,

<sup>48</sup> *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

In Chapter 6, Jesus begins to talk about some spiritual disciplines that we need to apply in our lives. He talks about giving. He talks about praying and He talks about fasting. At first He teaches us that we need to apply those disciplines to our life, but He says that the way that we apply it is so important. He says, “Are there any of you who are my disciples that when you pray you hope that somebody who is listening to your prayer thinks, ‘That is a really good prayer.’ Are there any of you disciples that when you give to the work of the Lord hope that at least someone will recognize that you have a generous spirit and thinks well of you because of that? And, is there anyone who practices a spiritual discipline like fasting, if you practiced that with a view that you hope others around you will look and say, ‘That person is a pretty spiritual guy,’ or woman, because if you practice those spiritual disciplines that way there is no reward for you in Heaven. You have received your reward through the praise of men. (Matthew 6:1-24)

Then Jesus talks about those issues of life that bring us anxiety and worry when He asks, “Are any of you worried about your food, your clothing, your job, some of the debts, or about retirement? When you worry don’t you understand that you are not depending upon God and that you are showing that you don’t trust the God who cares about you? (Matthew 6:25-32) He says, in Verse 33,

<sup>33</sup> *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

Then we open in Chapter 7 and Jesus introduces the subject: don’t judge. He says, “Don’t find fault with other people. Don’t criticize them. Don’t look for evil because if you do you will be judged.” All throughout there is this idea that God has His eye, not only upon our external life, but He has His upon our heart.

As we are listening to this Sermon, what is our response as we listen to this? Don’t we find ourselves growing smaller and smaller and smaller underneath it? Don’t we find ourselves saying, “You know you are exactly right, Jesus, but I am so wrong. I don’t live up. I don’t match up, and I tried and even after I have tried to live up to these things I still fail.”

There comes to a disciple who understands the righteousness of God and who understands God’s call, as these disciples were beginning to through Jesus’ message, this sense of despair and the inability to live out a kind of life that God requires. So what is a disciple to do? Jesus says this,

<sup>7</sup> *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*

“Lord, I am not measuring up! How is it possible to live this kind of life? I want to live a Godly life that you describe, but I don’t know if I can. How can I?” Ask, just ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Persevere. Put your hand to the plow and don’t look back. Keep knocking on the door of Heaven.

Jesus is telling us that we need grace if we are to live holy and righteous lives; if we are to live the kind of life that God calls us to. The Law of God is not able to help us here. The Law of God is very good in describing for us the kind of life that God requires, but it is impotent to help us to overcome our sin nature and to defeat the Evil One and his influences in our lives.

Often, in counseling, a person struggling with a particular sin, and again it may be one of the sins that Jesus mentioned – anger or lust or resentment, they may say, “I know what the Word of God says about my attitudes and about my actions, but I don’t know if I can stop. I have tried and you are not the first counselor I have gone to to talk to about this. I have tried, but I don’t know”, and what does Jesus say? Jesus gives us this great provision: ask and it will be given to you. This is an absolute provision.

We pray for God’s grace for ourselves and we pray for God’s grace for those whom we love. This becomes a dominant theme in the prayer life of the disciple and we understand what Jesus is teaching us. Why? Because it is grace that we need the absolute most. In order to have the kind of life that is walking in fellowship with God, enjoying God, worshipping God, is one that reflects God and His nature.

The Book of Hebrews is written to a group people who are very discouraged in their lives. They are underneath persecution and they are wondering if it is worth it to continue on and to persevere in the struggle to hold onto God in the midst of a world that is in opposition to them. This is the promise that God gives to such people, in Hebrews 4:

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Did Jesus know that His disciples are absolutely weak here as He talks to them in the Sermon on the Mount, “Yes!” That is why He says, “Ask”.

This, I believe, is Paul’s message at the end of Ephesians 6, after telling the disciples in the church at Ephesus these wonderful doctrines of God’s salvation and the applications of those doctrines that they are now children of the light and they can walk as children in the light, and he summarizes it all in Verses 10 through 20, all of the messages that have been to them in the first six chapters of Ephesians and he says to the Ephesian church that if they try to live out the life of discipleship in their own effort they will fail. He also talks about a battle that they are going to wage against the Evil One everyday in Verse 11. In Verses 14 and 15 he lists the elements in that armor: a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, a helmet of salvation, a shield of faith, feet shod with the Gospel of Peace, and a sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. And, at the very end, in Verse 18, after speaking of all the individual of armor we read Paul asks them to pray. What do you suppose he is telling them to pray for? He is telling them to pray about the battle. This is the very fundamental, foundational element of discipleship.

<sup>10</sup> “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup>Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup>Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup>Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup>and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup>Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup>And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

<sup>19</sup> “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”

One of the reasons why the quality of life of the Christian living in the United States is so poor, statistics tell us, in terms of Godliness, is that we do not take seriously enough Jesus’ command in this provision. Why haven’t we received? Why haven’t we found? Why haven’t the doors of Heaven been opened to us, flooding us with grace to strengthen us and to sanctify us? Why is that? James would say, in James 4:2, “You have not because you have asked not.” That is why!

We have to ask ourselves the question: in my praying, as I talk to God each day, how much of my praying is consumed with this issue of a sanctified life? How much of my praying is consumed with my pursuit of holiness, practical everyday holiness? How much of my praying is concerned about the sins that attack my soul and the victory that Jesus would give me today, this hour, against those sins.

If we are to be free from sin’s guilt, we need God’s saving grace and if we are to be free from sin’s dominion and power, we need God’s sanctifying grace.

There are two applications regarding God’s incredible provision. The first application is that we must better understand our need for grace. I find it strange that we do not see our own sin and it is rather incredible that we are able to see our own spiritual weaknesses more clearly. It should be apparent to us for the evidence gathers each day that we breathe. Our sin is no secret cancer growing inside. Others around us can see it. In Matthew 7:3, Jesus says,

<sup>3</sup> *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*

The answer is that I don't see the plank in my own eye. How do you not see a huge beam of wood sticking out from your face, but we don't. Others see it; our wives, our husbands, our children, and our moms and our dads, but we would deny it. We would deny it profusely. Friends, we must better understand our need for grace or we will not apply what Jesus is teaching here. We will not ask for that which we do not think we really need.

The Bible teaches us that we are, first, born dead in our trespasses and sins; that we are born children of wrath and sons of disobedience and if we are to be rescued from the guilt of our own sin and from the punishment and the judgment of our own sin it will be because we have flown to the Savior who died upon the cross for our sins and have embraced Him as Savior and as Lord.

Have you asked God to rescue you from your sin? Have you asked God to be your Savior? Have you knocked on the door of the One who died for you and said, "I need you to be my own Lord and I need you to be my Savior"?

What is true for the unbeliever is also still true for the believer as well; that we don't stop asking or seeking or knocking because we have received the precious gift of the forgiveness of sins, but we recognize that it is grace that teaches us to say, "No" to all ungodliness and to live righteous lives in this dark world, as Titus 2:12 would say. It is grace that teaches us these things, and it is God's gracious provision of His Son and it is God's gracious provision of access to His throne that gives us hope to be able to live a different kind of life.

We cannot remove the just punishment of God's wrath from our lives through our own efforts, our own obedience, or our own service to God. We need His grace and so we ask, but more than that, Christians, we cannot live our lives free of sin's reign through our own efforts either. The virtues of Godliness are gifts from God and if we are to have love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness and self-control it will be because the Holy Spirit has imparted these and has given these to us as a result of our dependent and humble requests upon Him each and every day.

So, Jesus says, "Ask and seek and knock." Friends, our spiritual progress is only made possible through the power of God's working. The joy of an obedient life is only realized by God's strengthening provision. We must better understand our need for grace.

The second application I would give to you is we must persist in asking God for grace as we pursue holiness. We must not let sin conquer us. We must not wallow in our own shame and despair as defeated believers, but we must keep fighting and keep running to the Father and asking Him.

There is a parallel passage in Luke 11. Here, in Matthew 7:7, 9, and 11, we read,

<sup>7</sup> *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find..."*

<sup>9</sup> *"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?"*

<sup>11</sup> *"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 good gifts to those who ask him!"*

The question is: what are good gifts? Are the health and wealth preachers correct that "good gifts" means anything that we could possibly ask for or desire in our fleshly hearts? Luke 11:13 helps us to understand.

<sup>13</sup> *"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!"*

Bound up with the Holy Spirit is every good gift that we could ever possibly need or desire, but in order to receive we must persist. Ahead of that Luke has a great, little story, in Verse 5, and it is a 1<sup>st</sup> Century story so it is one that is hard for us to understand in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century because our culture is so different. But, a friend comes at midnight to visit and he is hungry. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we would run out to WalMart if we didn't have food, or we would have said, "Why didn't you pick something up at McDonald's or at Burger King in your way in?" We assume that at midnight they have already been fed, but that is not true for the 1<sup>st</sup> Century traveler. There weren't fast food restaurants and food was hard to come by. They arrive at the end of an evening and they are famished. They have had no provisions. You have

nothing in your house and you know that it is your obligation to take care of them so you go to your neighbor's house. It is a small, one-room house and you knock.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century context the living room turns into the bedroom and the children are literally laying on the floor of the living room and for the mom or dad to get to the door they would have to wake up all of the children by stepping over them. This is a huge disruption for everyone.

(Knock, knock, knock) "Go away. My children are in bed." (Knock, knock, knock) "No, you don't understand. I need some food. We don't have any. Do you have some food?" "Yes, I do, but go away because my children are in bed and it is too big of a hassle." (Knock, knock, knock) The neighbor finally gets them the food!

The whole point of Jesus telling that story is not to suggest that God is reluctant, but to suggest that this is how a reluctant neighbor acts when we keep on knocking, how much more will the Father in Heaven, who delights to give good gifts to His children, will answer when we ask and when we persist in asking?

Why is it that God asks us to persist at all? Why doesn't God just give us what we need the first time we ask for it? Wouldn't it be wonderful when we pray to trust Jesus Christ as our Savior, and then right after we pray to trust Jesus Christ as our Savior we say, "God, give me all the strength that I will need for the rest of my life to live out a Godly life. Amen. Now I don't have to pray anymore!"

Why would God ask us to persist, that every moment of every day we would be asking? Let me suggest three reasons. First, persistence brings glory to God by causing us to depend upon Him each moment of our day. Secondly, persistence makes us treasure the gift of practical holiness all the more when we recognize what a tremendous gift it is when we are liberated. Third, persistence prepares our souls to receive God's gifts. How small our souls would be if God would give us all of His gifts without our persistence and without our perseverance in them.

A teenager had decided to quit the football team saying that he was just fed up with it all and that it was too much of a hassle and he was tired. His father was deeply concerned because he knew that his son didn't have good reasons to quit, so he decided to give one of those "dad talks" that dads give to their sons about quitting. He was telling him that no good thing has ever come from quitting, that everything good that has happened and everything great that has happened throughout world history has happened because people persisted.

He began to give some examples. He said, "Take for instance, son, Abraham Lincoln, the greatest president the United States ever had. He persisted. Take for instance Thomas Edison, the greatest inventor the United States has ever known. He persisted. He didn't quit. General Douglas McArthur was one of the greatest generals this nation has ever known. He didn't quit, son. He persisted.

"Then there is Elmo McKrinkle." The son looked at his dad and said, "Who is Elmo McKrinkle?" "See, no one knows him, son, because he quit."

God is teaching us to ask and to persist in asking. Don't quit. If you want greatness for you soul don't quit in asking.

The second point is the promise of prayer. Jesus teaches us not only to pray with persistence, but also with hope, as we read in Verse 8,

<sup>8</sup> *"For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."*

Jesus is explaining to His disciples that they can have confidence that God will give us the goods that we need when we ask Him. Is this a blank check that God is offering us? No! 1 John 5:14-15 talks about that God will give us what we ask for when we pray in His will, according to His plan, and according to His design.

<sup>14</sup>This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup>And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Aren't we glad that God doesn't give us everything that we ask? We don't know what is perfect for our lives in our future, but we can absolutely be confident that God knows and that His plan is absolutely perfect when we ask,

according to God's will. So often times when we look at this promise and we ask for things and God says, "No!" then this promise must not be true.

I liked one of my professors, Dr. Howard Hendricks, at seminary. He told the story that as a single young man he went to a church to speak and there was a woman who came up to him after the service and said, "Howard, I want you to know that I have been praying that you would marry my daughter." Dr. Hendricks looked at the class and said, "Have you ever thanked God for unanswered prayers?"

We ought to thank God for unanswered prayers because sometimes I am sure that this dear woman thought that would be God's plan for her daughter, but it wasn't because God had something better for her daughter and He had something better for Howard Hendricks; He had a more perfect plan.

But, friends, if we pray for our sanctification, and if we pray for victory over sin, and if we pray for a life that reflects God's glory how confident can we be? What is the promise that God has laid before us?

Satan loves to lie to us as he leads us toward sin. Satan tells us at least three big lies to us throughout our life. First, when we are young he comes to us and says, "You know, that action and that attitude is not going to hurt if you try it just once. You just want to taste of this so that you can say that you have experienced it." So, we taste and we believe that lie and there is a dark and a dearth that attaches to our soul and we want to scrub it out but it is not being removed.

Satan comes and says, "Now that you are unclean and now that you have blown it you might as well continue to. You can't back up the train and get back the purity of heart and get back that spotlessness so you might as well just continue in it." So, we believe that lie and we continue in it.

The third lie comes eventually in our lives and says, "Hey, I know that you want to be free from this sin but you can't. I have you now. You are enslaved and there is no hope for you anymore. You might as well just give up because nothing will ever change to bring you righteousness."

In the face of each one of those lies is Jesus' gracious words and promise: "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened."

The picture of prayer is the last issue we want to look at. It is a wonderful picture Jesus uses to close this section. In Verse 9, we read, and again our 21<sup>st</sup> Century eyes don't read everything that is here,

<sup>9</sup> *"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?"*

Of course, bread was baked in little rolls in that 1<sup>st</sup> Century time and so a roll bread and a stone looked an awful lot alike. A hungry child says, "Dad, could you give me what I need? Could you give me some bread because I am hungry?" The dad says, "This stone looks quite a bit like a roll. Here", and the child breaks a tooth. What father would do that? Jesus continued in Verse 10,

<sup>10</sup> *"Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?"*

Remember, they didn't have Kellogg and Post cereals and milk to put into the refrigerator for breakfast in the morning, but often times, in that context, the dad would be out at the lake and he would be fishing for breakfast early in the morning. He would be putting his net out and as he did, he would draw in some fish. The little boy would get up and be hungry that day and he knew that breakfast was about to come. He says, "Dad, can I have a fish?" All sorts of lake creatures would be in that net, some of which would be fish that would be edible, some would be fish that would be thrown out, and sometimes they would catch a snake in the net. So a father sees the snake and sees the son asking for a fish and thinks, "This will be really fun", and he throws the son a poisonous snake. What father would do that?

This is what Jesus says, in Verse 11,

<sup>11</sup> *"If you, then, though you are evil..."*

Let's not race past that because Jesus is making a statement about our nature; is man basically good or does man have an evil nature? He couldn't be more clear. He talks about the depravity of the soul and of our need from the moment we are born that we are born depraved; that we are born into a condition in need of deliverance and salvation, that we are born marked by Adam's sin. And also, by the way, Jesus is suggesting His own sinlessness when He says, "If you, being evil..." Jesus was fully human but He was not marked by sin. He is the sinless One.

Jesus continues,

<sup>11</sup> *"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 good gifts to those who ask him!"*

There are three principles we want to look at. The first principle is that when we pray to God as our Father. This is how we approach Him. God is not the Father of all mankind by nature. By nature we are children of wrath and sons of disobedience, but to as many as who have received Jesus Christ, to them God gave the authority to become children; to call out to God and to talk to Him as a little boy or a little girl talks to their daddy, "Abba, Daddy, Father".

This past week my youngest son came ill with a 104 degree temperature. A father's heart goes out to their little children as they are lying sick. I went up to his bed and felt his forehead and I said, "Jackson, is there anything I can do for you?" He spoke with this croaky voice and said, "Daddy, could you bring me a glass of water?" "Go get it yourself, son!" (Laughter)

If I, being evil, know how to give good gifts when my children ask for something that they need, of course, I ran down and got him a glass of water and it moved my heart to be able to do so and be able to do something. It was a joyful thing to give my son something that he needed that would refresh him and help him in a time of need.

If we being evil know how to do that, how much more does the Father in Heaven know how to give good gifts when we say, "God, I am struggling here and there is an attitude in my heart and there is an attitude in my soul. I want to be like Christ and I am so weak, would you give me grace to obey you and to change my heart?"

The second principle we learn from this picture is that when we pray God never makes mistakes. Our earthly father sometimes make mistakes; sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally, but our Father in Heaven never makes a mistake – not intentionally. His love never fails, and never unintentionally – His wisdom never fails. He always gives that which is good for us.

Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones would say, "If we but knew that we were in the hands of such a Father, our outlook upon the future would be entirely transformed."

The last principle is that when we pray God gives incredibly good gifts. This is the theme throughout the entire Bible; God gives incredibly good gifts. He gives us the Holy Spirit and with the Holy Spirit He gives us everything in addition to have a future, a hope, a fellowship with God, and a purpose. All of these things are the most important, joyful, and glorious gifts we could ever possibly ask or think about. That is the way we face our future: knowing that we have a Father in Heaven who never makes mistakes and who gives us incredibly good gifts.

I urge you to take stock of your life. Consider what spiritual qualities you lack and where God needs to work on the attitudes of your heart and upon your actions, and then to pray passionately and persistently, being confident that you have a Father in Heaven who loves you and who will give you good gifts.

Why is it that Pastor Daniel kept looking for his wedding ring? It was because it was really, really important to him.

Why do we keep praying to be conformed to the image of Jesus? It is because as followers and disciples of Jesus it is really, really important to us.