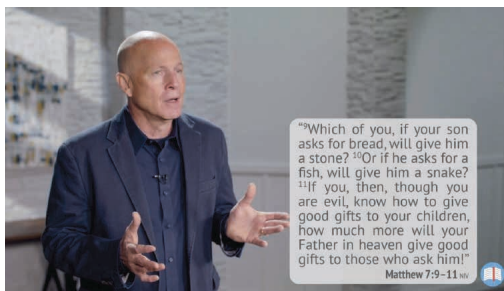


Why Not Ask?



Welcome back to the Our Daily Bread University Prayer Basics course. Today we're going to talk about asking. Asking is a vital part of praying, and Jesus had a lot to say about it. He made some bold promises about asking, like this one in John 15:7: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Jesus used that phrase "whatever you ask" at least six times, and it's clear that our asking is important to Him. One of my favorite promises from Jesus about asking is from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:9–11, when he said, "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 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!" I love that because it shows us God's heart. Even though we're corrupted by sin, if our child came to us and said, "May I please have a fish?" we wouldn't respond by saying "Take this snake instead!" If we know how to do good things for our children when they ask, we can be assured that God wants to do us good.

I've experienced that in my own life many, many times, more times than I can remember—but one particular incident comes to mind. When I was in college, I wrestled against God's calling me into the ministry for some time. But after a few years I finally gave in, and once I did, things suddenly began to get much more difficult than I expected. Have you ever had that happen, where you choose to do the right thing and life just gets harder? I was holding down two jobs on top of a full class schedule, and I didn't know how I was going to make ends meet for my last year. I began to wonder if I had heard God's calling correctly and started to question my faith. I was a philosophy major, so I questioned a lot of things. One night I was outside of my apartment sitting in my old car trying to figure it all out, when I prayed, "God, I just don't know what I'm doing anymore. I thought you were calling me into the ministry. But please, if you really want me to do this, you've got to do something! Do something so that I know it's you, the God of Jesus Christ!" That prayer was a cry from the heart, and I resolved to wait and look for an answer.

Two days later I received a phone call from the college. There was a new scholarship that was being offered by someone in the

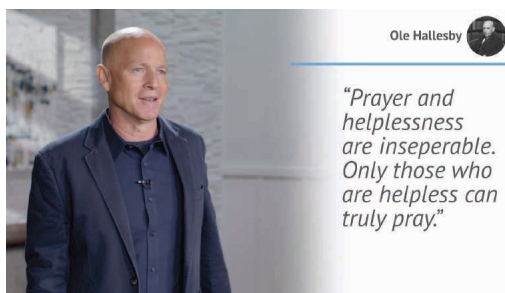
community, and they thought I should know about it. “All you have to do,” they told me, “was Go to this church on a weekday afternoon and talk with the pastor.” The next week I did that, and the pastor told me, “There are two things you need to know about this scholarship. First, it was given by a family that became Christians through the ministry of this church. Second, you don’t even have to be a believer to receive it, but it’s given for one reason only, and that is to show the love of Jesus Christ.” I left not knowing whether I would receive anything, and doubting that it would be much if I did. But a week later a check arrived made out to the college in my name that made up the difference for what I needed to finish my last year. And it wasn’t cheap. And I immediately thought about how I had prayed, “God, do something!” Not only were my needs for my final year in college taken care of, but it was done in a way that specifically answered my prayer: it showed the love and power of Jesus Christ.

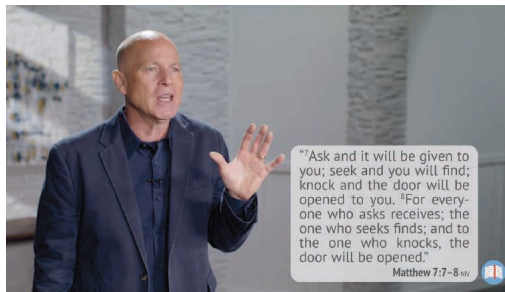
Now, as I share this, it’s important to emphasize that God’s Word is very clear on the point that our faith is not a means to financial gain. But the real point of that story isn’t about money. It’s about God’s kindness and His ability to help us in unexpected ways. And that happens when we pray. And that brings us to our first point about prayer and asking: One, God is good and wants us to come to Him with our needs. He wants us to live lives that are dependent on Him in prayer, lifting our hearts to Him through the day. Ole Hallesby put it this way: “Prayer and helplessness are inseparable. Only those who are helpless can truly pray.” God wants us to come to Him in the raw and everyday moments of life when our asking is anything but perfect.

When I prayed that prayer in college, my prayer was certainly imperfect, but God met me where I was. And I believe that’s why Jesus talked about asking with such large terms, even using the phrase, “Whatever you ask.” He knows about our natural tendency to want to do things in our own strength, and He wants to show us something more. He wants us to get to the end of ourselves so that He can pry our fingers loose from the world and turn our hearts and minds to Him. He wants to set us free to live expectantly as children of God, looking forward to Him most of all. That’s why Jesus encouraged us to pray with these words in Matthew 7:7–8, “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.” Do you see how broad that is, and how reassuring? It’s as if He is saying, “Just ask!” God is saying, “Come and talk

Prayer and Asking

- God is good, and wants us to come to Him with our needs.





with me! Get to know me!" It's a very open invitation!

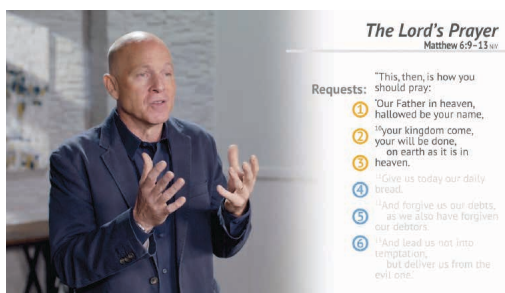
But if you're like me, sometimes when you think about asking God, you remember that time you prayed about something and you didn't get what you asked for. Maybe you had to wait awhile, or it didn't happen at all. That can be so difficult, especially when you're asking for something good. We'll devote a whole lesson to unanswered prayer a little later, but for now it's important to emphasize that Jesus means what He says when He talks about asking in such bold terms. Remember that He does this a number of times in the New Testament. We tend to put a lot of qualifiers and disclaimers on the way we pray: Are we asking with enough faith? Are we asking according to the will of God? Are we asking with the right motives? Those are important things, and Jesus teaches us about that. But we can't forget that His starting point is that we serve a generous and loving God who really wants us to ask! After all, why would Jesus talk about asking in such lavish terms if He put all kinds of qualifiers on it and didn't really mean it? Jesus wants to open our minds to living in relationship with God every day. He doesn't want us to have a law of averages mentality about prayer: Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. Or, to see it as a quid pro quo legalistic thing where we have to do things just so or He won't answer. He wants us to "Come and ask!" And that brings us to our second point.

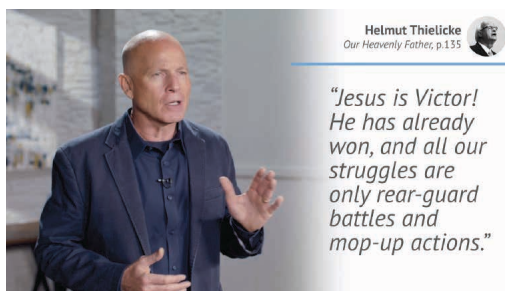
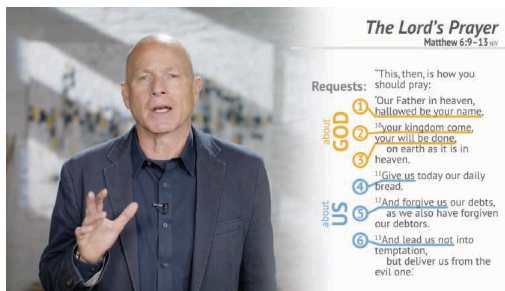
Jesus shows us *how to ask* especially when He teaches us the Lord's Prayer. Remember that when Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, He began with these words: "This, then, is how you should pray." And then, by showing us three requests, Jesus teaches us how to go deeper in our asking. He begins with, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." There are six requests in all in the Lord's Prayer, and the way Jesus organizes it shows us the ultimate example for our own praying. Notice that the first three requests are about God most of all. The very first, "Hallowed be your name" is actually saying, "May your name be acknowledged and honored as holy. Of course God is always holy, but this is a request that all will recognize His holiness.

Then comes the second request: "Your kingdom come." We need to be reminded to pray for God's kingdom because we get so tied down to this earth. This is a way of helping us look forward to Him and make sure we're living for Him in everything we do, with our eyes on the prize. The third request is like it: "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." It's a way of saying, "Your way, Lord,

Prayer and Asking

- God is good, and wants us to come to Him with our needs.
- Jesus shows us how to ask.





in all things. Help me to want what you want most of all." This can be a real challenge for us, because our natural tendency is to want to simply ask God to bless us as we go about our lives. But this prayer puts us before Him as His servants, so that we say, "Your way, Lord, most of all."

These are powerful things to pray if we really mean them. But how easy it is to say the Lord's Prayer on autopilot, without thinking about what we're really saying! You might find it helpful to break it down phrase by phrase like a template for prayer, as we're doing now, and pray the meaning of each of those requests.

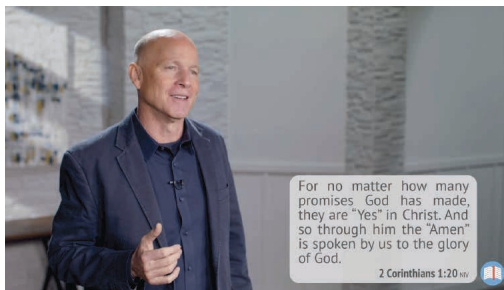
The last three requests of the Lord's Prayer are focused on us: "Give us today our daily bread." That's a prayer about our everyday needs; and it's so important for us to realize that there is no request that is too small for God because He is that large, He is large enough, great enough, infinite in His power, so that He is able to care about the most intimate details in our lives. Then in the prayer comes, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." We have to slam on the brakes here for a moment. That's like saying, "Lord, I want you to forgive me just like I've forgiven others." Think about Whom we're talking to when we say that. As soon as we say that we should begin to think of people we need to forgive, shouldn't we? Jesus wants us to have that kind of generous spirit because we have been forgiven so much. And the truth is, we can't do it in our own strength—God has to help us, so this brings us back to that. We need to ask!

Then comes the last request: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Of course God never tempts anyone, but the devil is real; and this is a request for God to help us want to do what is right. I love what the German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke said. He stood against the Nazi regime during World War II, and he said about this request, "Jesus is Victor! He has already won, and all our struggles are only rear-guard battles and mop-up actions" (*Our Heavenly Father*, p. 135). It's amazing the difference calling on God can make when you're in the middle of temptation. It's like turning on the light outside on a hot night, and seeing the roaches run for cover. The devil simply cannot stand against Jesus; and Jesus wants us to ask Him to help us whenever we struggle.

The six requests of the Lord's Prayer show us our priorities for living in God's presence and our deep dependence on Him, and we can be assured that when we use them as the model for our own prayers, we are asking in ways that He loves to answer.

Prayer and Asking

- God is good, and wants us to come to Him with our needs.
- Jesus shows us how to ask.
- Pray BIG!



And so we come to a third and final insight about asking and prayer, and here it is in just two words: Pray big! We need to ask God to do big things, believing with faith that He will. No request—just like no request is too little for God—no request is too big for Him either. So what if we ask? I think this is one of the reasons why Jesus said in Matthew 18:3 that we have to change and become like little children to enter the kingdom of God. Children are dependent, and they know it. Children also have imagination, and oh, how we need to pray like that! There is no one more creative than God, and we should ask Him to help us ask for the things He wants us to ask for. That's really praying big. We can put so many limitations on prayer and on God; and I think one of the reasons for that is we've made it all about ourselves. But James, the brother of Jesus, wrote, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3). The order of the Lord's Prayer shows us that God wants us to start with a kingdom focus for our hearts and lives. As we do, we will see Him do beautiful things.

If we have received Jesus, He has already given us salvation. That's the biggest gift of all, and everything else must be considered in light of that. 2 Corinthians 1:20 reminds us, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." Jesus continues to pray for us and will help us as we pray. God has given us so many promises in His Word, and waits for us to pray! So don't hold back. Never let it be said of you that you do not receive because you do not ask. Pray big, with visions and requests as big as the kingdom of God. Call on Him and what only He can do; and we will see heaven touch earth until His kingdom comes. Let's wrap up with this prayer:

Lord, bless us as we pray. And, oh, come soon, Lord Jesus. Help us to look forward to You most of all. Be our vision as we live, Lord. And help us to live closer and closer to You. In Your name we pray, amen.