### Warm Springs Church Logo June 25

# Pray Once More

**Matthew 7:7-8 NIV**

**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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.**

How Is Your Praying Going?

Every student at some point experiences a teacher who is intimidating. Sometimes it is because the material covered in her class is so difficult; perhaps it is because the teacher has odd personality quirks that push the students back. There are times it is due to the deep psychological wounds the teacher still bears and uses anger to get things done. It could be the teacher is so attractive that no one feels perfectly comfortable talking to him. There are teachers that are prideful and they use an advanced technical vocabulary to make their students feel small and inadequate. The first and maybe the only intimidating teacher I ever had was Miss Simms, my high school trigonometry teacher. She had a stacked bouffant hairdo, piercing blue eyes, a jutting chin, and little rectangular glasses she perched at the tip of her colossal nose. Her nickname among the students was “Sergeant Simms” because of her propensity to bark out orders at us and publically humiliate students who weren’t working hard enough. Because I was never doing my homework, there was a moment in every one of her classes which I dreaded. It was when she called one of us up to the blackboard and demanded that we work out in front of the entire class a problem from the assignment. When she finally got to my name, my heart nearly exploded in my chest as I walked up the center aisle to the blackboard to work out my problem. I was panic stricken because I had no idea what to do. Suddenly the thought struck me. Pray. So I did…feverishly. Waiting for a divine revelation, I stalled as long as I could; hoping my prayers would be answered and I would at once know what to do. But I didn’t know what to do. If I had stayed at that blackboard one hundred years I would not have known what to do. And so, with my prayers unanswered, I slunk off to my seat humiliated in front of the school’s best and brightest students.

Perhaps like me, you have found yourself desperately praying, only to realize you were not going to get what you wanted. Have you ever prayed and were disappointed by the results? Did you ever have an expectation that God would give you what you wanted and it didn’t happen that way? Do you kind of hope God would become Santa Claus without any coal available to hand you if you have been bad? Are you frustrated that others give exhilarating testimonies of answers to prayer and you have none worth sharing? Has praying outlived its usefulness? Are you afraid to pray about the things you really care about because you don’t want to be disappointed? What do you make of Jesus’ statements on praying?

There may not be a more important passage on prayer in the Bible than the one found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. It is extraordinarily blunt and assertive. **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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.** (Vs. 7-8 NIV) This passage moves on two levels and if we are to be honest in how we respond to this teaching we must examine both levels. Because prayer is what everyone naturally sees in these verses quoting Jesus, we will deal with that first. The promise Jesus makes here is underscored by His comments that come just after. **Which of you, if his 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!** (Matthew 7: 9-11 NIV)

Without going any further, we must take seriously Jesus’ assertion that God loves us more than we love anyone and if we have the generosity of personality to give our kids the good they ask to have and not cruelly make them miserable by giving them something useless or worse by giving them something harmful, infinitely more so God gives us good each time we ask for good. Unfortunately, many have been broken over this rock…they have prayed for something, prayed fervently for something they desperately wanted and didn’t get it and so they have given up on God, flushed away all hopes of Him being good or interested in them. This is a terrible tragedy…an unnecessary tragedy. How many declared atheists are actually distraught pray-ers, heart-broken seekers of God? Let us look at prayer carefully today so that we understand fully what happens as we pray.

There are indications, strong ones in fact that we can change God’s mind when we pray. There are at least three hints of this in the Bible. The first is when Moses begged God not to destroy all the Israelites after they made an idol and engaged in nation-wide debauchery. It was an appalling scene Moses came upon when he arrived in the Israelite camp. Naked, drunken bodies were everywhere and there at the center was a golden calf...a tool of demons. God declared that He was going to strike them all dead and would have in the next few moments if Moses didn’t pray and ask God not to do it.

**"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "O Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?...Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people...Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.** (Exodus 32:9-11a, 12 b, 14 NIV)

King Hezekiah of Judah also prayed and the result was that God changed his mind regarding the terminal illness Hezekiah had. **In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.** (2 Kings 20:1-5 NIV) God was not playing with Hezekiah, not prodding him into despairing dependence. Hezekiah was told by God that he would die and he would have died but Hezekiah prayed and asked God to heal him and God changed His mind on this. Twice now we see praying impact what God was going to do, not in theory but in real time historically. The prophet Jeremiah quoted the Lord indicating that this indeed was possible. If the people of Jerusalem would repent and turn to God for help, the disaster the Lord said would come upon them would not take place. **Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.** Jeremiah 26:12-13 NIV

The point is that God has historically changed His mind on matters after certain people have prayed. He even says He will do things differently if people pray. So now we come to the point when prayer skeptics raise their eyebrows and shut down psychologically because they have been disappointed by their prayer efforts. We need to make one more point regarding praying for things before we address the matter of what is the reason why our prayers don’t come out as we want and we will have to do this at a later date. It is that the most important principle regarding praying is that we are to keep asking and not quit asking, keep pursuing in prayer what we want and not stop pursuing it, keep knocking and not give up on the knocking, expecting full-well the door will be opened. The language is clear on this. Jesus tells us to continually and constantly ask for what we want of God, not ever losing our determination. There are two stories Jesus told to get this point across about praying.

The first is found in Luke 11: 5ff. A man goes to his friend’s house at midnight asking if he can borrow some bread because he has an unexpected houseguest from out of town and needs to provide a meal for him. The friend though is already in bed, his door is locked and his kids are asleep. Being poor, they would have had only a one room house and the commotion of trying to get the door opened would have awakened the exhausted children. Besides, he didn’t want to get up either. But the man eventually gets what he wants. **I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.** Luke 11:8 NIV Yet, not because it is a friend asking him for the favor but due to the man’s “boldness” as the NIV translates it, the better translation is “impudence, persistence, even annoying persistence”, the friend will get the man some bread. It is right after this story Jesus tells that in Luke He explains the importance of continually asking from God until you get the answer to your prayer.

Also in Luke Jesus tells a story about a poor widow who demands of a corrupt judge that he give her justice in her case but he is not willing to help her. Finally he relents because the widow keeps bothering him with the request, pestering him, getting in his face. Jesus then declares that this is exactly how God wants us to be. **And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"** Luke 18: 7-8 NIV It is not a sign of faith to pray for something and then to move on to other business. Faith God wants in us is the sort that demands of God; that persistently keeps after Him, that refuses to quit on a request. God doesn’t want us weakly requesting something and then giving up on the request. He wants us shaking the heavens with our praying, crying out day and night for our request, annoying Him with our wants. That is faith praying…persistence, demanding, begging even. Proud Christians who are too cool to make much of their praying and go very far in it will see few answers to their prayers. It is the beggars and the demanders and the constant seekers who will have great prayers be theirs.

Do we really believe that the age of miracles is past? Have we grown so world centric that we do not believe in Heaven intervening any more in our lives? Jesus’ question is chilling. When He returns, will He find faith on earth? Will He find people praying feverishly for God’s help? Will He look upon the miracles that have come to pass because some…perhaps you and I are still praying because we believe God does give us what we ask!