###  Warm Springs Church Logo June 25

# The Business of Prayer

**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.**

Are You A Prayer Warrior?

One of our cars recently started having engine problems. It was hesitating at stop lights and didn’t idle right. The car lacked the power it had before and honestly it didn’t have much power even when it was at its best. The check engine line flashed and that is never a good sign. At the same time, it had to be smogged to be registered and it couldn’t pass the smog test as long as the check engine light was lit. I had to take the car to the mechanic to see what was wrong with it even though I knew it would end up being a costly trip. Turns out the spark plugs weren’t all firing properly and so I had to have a complete tune-up. The engine was out of sync. Just one misfiring spark plug is enough to throw the engine thoroughly out of whack. It isn’t great when our car engine isn’t firing on all cylinders; even worse when we are the ones misfiring; when we are not “firing on all clyinders”!

Have you ever been out of sync at work…you felt like you were just off in everything you tried to do? You kept making typing mistakes, had communication problems with your co-workers, you couldn’t concentrate on the tasks you had to get done? It can be pretty brutal when you and your spouse are out of sync! Everything you say puts the two of you on the verge of an argument, you can’t agree on what to eat, what to watch on TV, what to do about the bills, how to divide up the chores. Perhaps you have misfired with your children. You said something you now regret; you are not communicating well, your expectations and your child’s are miles apart, you feel like nothing but slave labor for your master children and you are not appreciated nor respected by them. Do you ever find yourself performing badly at school, you can’t concentrate on what the professor is teaching, you don’t understand your assignment, you are not getting along with your classmates for some unexplainable reason? It doesn’t take much to find yourself out of sync; sometimes it is an unexpected argument, a piece of equipment not working right, too little sleep the night before, an unexplainable mood swing. When we are misfiring, it can throw our entire day out of whack and leave us agitated and irritable.

Our praying can be out of whack too and the most common reason for us misfiring here is something nearly hidden to most casual readers of the Sermon on the Mount. Let’s take a closer look at the passage we have quoted above and its full context. **"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. "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! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.** Matthew 7:7-12 NIV What is surprising to most who quote Matthew 7: 7 as properly a teaching on prayer is that when seen in its setting within Jesus’ sermon is that personal behavior is the center of Jesus’ discussion on praying. He uses two examples to show how ridiculous it is to believe God the Father is going to disregard our prayer requests. Even parents like you and I who are sinful and selfish and a bit lazy will not torment our children by giving them a snake when a fish is requested. But in the metaphor that teaches us of God’s care for us, our behavior is accentuated. The Lord assumes we will treat our children kindly and lovingly. The “so then” which concludes this part of Jesus’ sermon is one of the most profound comments on behavior ever offered. “So, in telling you about praying”, Jesus in essence teaches, “you are to do to others just as the Father in Heaven does with regard to your prayer requests.”

This is a most startling revelation. Our praying is connected to our doing but not as we would expect. Most, if they did agree there is a link between our actions and our prayers, would assume that the connection is between our behavior and getting what we want when praying. If we are good, God will give us what we ask and if we are bad, then who knows how He might react. That is never stated by Jesus. The actual link between praying and behavior is much more profound and direct. We are expected to treat people the way God treats us when we pray and if we aren’t, our praying is out of whack; it is not in sync with God. The absurdity Christ expresses is the insanity of the parent who would give a stone to a hungry child clamoring for bread. If we are praying, praying correctly, then we know how to treat others. Just like Christ responds to us; that is how Christian people are to react to the ones God puts in our lives. We are, in a profound way, answers to prayer for those all around us.

Let me illustrate this lifestyle using Jesus’ own carrying out of the “Ask, Seek, Knock” template. Ask. Jesus asked the blind man, **"What do you want me to do for you?"** (Luke 18:41 NIV) It was a simple question but certainly not rhetorical. The blind man was very much in need and the answer to the question was his most desperate longing. In the same way He asked two blind men the same question. **"What do you want me to do for you?"** (Matthew 20:32 NIV) The pair nearly screamed their reply. **"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."** (Matthew 20:33 NIV) John records a most interesting interchange between Jesus and His mother. They were both at a relative’s wedding feast and the groom had run out of wine for the guests. In response to the groom’s crisis, Mary approached Jesus with the news. **"They have no more wine."**

(John 2:3 NIV) Jesus’ reply is startling! Literally He asks her, **“What to you and to me?”** (John 2: 4) Another way to put it is, “What does this have to do with us?” Of course at first glance this sounds rude. He could clearly see just how disturbed His mother was by the groom’s predicament. Yet the problem He faced was in miraculously intervening, the miracle would potentially cause wild public reaction when He was just starting to develop His training of the Disciples. He knew in the end the miracles would lead to His crucifixion. The question though brought to light all Jesus needed to know about Mary’s feelings. Something about her expression sent Him into action.

It is the question that validates the personality of another! The question says I noticed you, I see you, I want to know about you, I care about your circumstance and who you are. The other day someone approached me and asked me if I was better. In that moment, I knew I mattered to someone…that one person held to me as a real person whom she valued. The question, “What can I do for you” may be the most important part of your day in your life with God as you come across the ones God brings your way. Jesus made the question divine.

The second part of the template is “seek”. One of the more fascinating glimpses into the psychology of Jesus is the match-making He did from the cross. In horrific agony, He still had the wherewithal to search out through the little crowd two people who needed His help and put them together. **When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home**. (John 19:26-27 NIV) He found His mother and saw she needed a son…one made in His image. Mary had four other sons already….and had who knows how may daughters. **"Isn't this (Jesus) the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?”** (Matthew 13:55-56 NIV) Why would Mary have needed another son? On paper she didn’t. But Jesus sought her out and knew she did need a son. She needed a certain son. John. John also needed a mother…he needed Mary. Jesus knew both this things because He sought out each of them. He looked for them and found them in the condition where they were…one needing a son, the other needing a mother.

Christian people who actually follow Jesus seek out the ones God gives them. They look about and notice what God shows them in their co-workers, friends, relatives, classmates and people around the world. Christian people who follow Jesus don’t just shrug off what God reveals. They pay attention. They put effort into looking around. They have stopped being so into themselves that they actively look about to find out where God is working and what God is doing with people within their view…people maybe they never noticed before. The Christian who follows Jesus pays attention to what others need and latches onto what she sees.

The third part of the template is “knock”. Over and over again we see that Jesus had “compassion” on people. He felt the need of others in His “gut”. **When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them…** (Mark 6:34 NIV) **Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.** (Mark 1:41 NIV) **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** (Matthew 9:36 NIV) Some people feel sorry for others. When the Spirit of God is working freely in us, we ache with pain over the troubles others face. We physically experience the hurt and hardship. But when it comes to knocking, the reaction leads to action. The famous parable Jesus told of the Good Samaritan is notable because out of three people who saw a broken down man on the side of the road, only one of them did something about it. The Samaritan bent down, tended to the man’s wounds, took him to an inn and cared for him. Then he paid the innkeeper enough that the innkeeper tended to the man until the Samaritan could return and make sure he was fine. In the story, Jesus said the Samaritan had “compassion”; he felt the pain of the stricken man on the side of the road in his gut. **"But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him (the wounded man); and when he saw him, he felt compassion,** (Luke 10:33-34 NASU)

Here is the difference between those who feel sorry for others and the ones who have compassion; who like Jesus feel the pain in their gut. They do something about what they feel. Nothing Jesus did, not even the miracles on the Sabbath, was as shockingly compassionate as His response to the tax collector Zacchaeus. Just walking through Jericho, with His huge entourage of religious zealots and disciples and paparazzi tagging along with Him, Jesus came upon Zacchaeus; dreadful Zacchaeus, despised and rejected Zacchaeus, greedy and selfish Zacchaeus, and as soon as he looked up at him perched in a tree, the Lord invited Himself over to the tax-collector’s house for lunch. This was not self-serving on Jesus’ part…He was not desperate for free food. The Lord knew how to go without eating for forty days and more than that, feed thousands with just a few small fish and loaves of bread. Jesus saw the desperate hunger for love in Zacchaeus’s eyes and gave Himself to the pitiful man for the day. One of the most loving and compassionate responses we can make is to give someone our time. That is precisely what Jesus did. He responded to the compassion He felt in His gut and threw open His day to the broken Zacchaeus.

Praying is far more than just asking for what we want, seeking what we want, knocking on the door hoping to get what we want. Praying is asking others, “What can I do for you?” Praying is seeking the good of others; seeking out the people God brings our way and seeing them, paying attention to them. Praying is feeling in our gut the hurt and pain and needs others have and doing something about it…knocking. Perhaps your life has been out of whack. Rather than letting God use you to be an answer to prayer for others, maybe you have been asking, seeking, knocking mostly for yourself. Your praying has grown disconnected from the rest of the world. What if it is possible, and this question is not asked lightly, you might be someone’s answer to prayer; you might be the most important part of God’s promise the Lord has made to someone you haven’t noticed yet? What if the Lord is waiting for you to look around so that He can put a broken life back together? What if by you knocking, you could be the most precious memory another person ever has this side of Heaven?