

## **“Good God” – Matthew 7:7-11**

Jeremiah Ebeling – 5/22/2011

Presentation of Giant Killer Award:

This year’s award is going to a married couple who have worked with us for eight years, which is longer than we have had any youth pastor except for one. They have carried two classes from their freshman year all through their senior year. As far as I have counted at least, they have been at least partially responsible for five marriages coming out of our youth group. I am also very happy to say that none of those marriages are happening within this current senior class that they are also leading. That is a good thing. But this couple is a godly couple and I love that our students get to see the example of an active and thriving faith in them. It is seen in the way that they interact with one another, how they love each other. It is seen in the godly parents that they are. It is seen in the work they do around the world with orphans in Zeeway, not just here with our high schoolers. I would like to present this year’s award to Matt & Julie Kouri. We love you guys.

There is something that I have a really hard time understanding. Why don’t you pray more than you do? What is your excuse? Is it because you are too busy? Why don’t you just take something off your schedule – slow down – make it happen? Is it because you are maybe too tired? With all the things you have going on, you just don’t have the energy to do it? Maybe you just don’t feel like doing it. There is something you would always rather be doing, something easier, something more enjoyable. Maybe it is that you are just not trying hard enough. Maybe that is it. Maybe you really don’t want a better relationship with God, or else you would be praying more.

Have you ever had a conversation like that? Not with someone else, of course, or with a crowd of people – but with yourself. I have various renditions of that conversation with myself quite regularly. If it is not time, it is energy, or it is my emotions, or it is my will. I come up with all these different reasons, these great factors for why I am not praying more than I do. I just get tired of feeling guilty and frustrated about my prayer life.

What I think God would want me to feel is a sense of peace and closeness with Him. Do you ever feel that? I bet a lot of us here end up feeling guilty quite a bit about the status of our prayer lives. We wish that it was better than it is.

But what if time, energy, emotions, and will are not the real problems with our lame prayer lives? What if those are not the real issues? What if the real issue is something much deeper and more important than any of those things?

That is what Jesus proposes when He is addressing a very large crowd of people who are also very frustrated with their prayer lives, who are not praying all that much and blaming a bunch of different things probably. He does not talk about busy calendars. He does not talk about demanding jobs or home life. He does not talk about the fact that they don't have the right emotions involved – they are not feeling the right things. He does not say it is because of insufficient will power. What He thinks is the reason that they are not praying more is because of their theology. Because of what they believe about God, He is saying – that is the reason you are not praying more than you do.

Today we are going to be looking at a passage about this topic, this issue. In this passage, what Jesus does is tell us two things about prayer that we *have* to hear. And there is a bunch He does not say about prayer. He does not answer some of the big questions that you might have about why God does and does not answer some of your prayers. We are not going to be talking about that today. But we will be talking about these two things that Jesus says we have got to know about our prayer lives if they are going to get any better.

The first thing that He says is that we need to be praying persistently. Then He gets involved in our theology. The second point, He gets into this incorrect theology that is behind the reason we are not praying more, that we are not praying persistently. He starts making some adjustments in that theology because He knows the only way we are going to pray persistently is if we start thinking and believing differently about God.

Right now, let's look at the first point that Jesus makes, that we need to be praying persistently.

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

So Jesus says, the things that you need, the things on your heart, you need to be bringing them to God. You need to ask God. Ask God to help with those things.

But He does not stop there, does he. He says, no, no, no, don't just ask. I want you to be also seeking. But don't just seek either; I also want you to be knocking. By now, His audience is thinking – Okay, we get it. When we have something we need, we need to come to God with that. But He does not stop there; he says it again – no, really, ask, seek, knock. What do you need? What is on your heart? Would you just bring that to God? – He says it six different times because that is how many times it needed to be heard and that is how often He wants us to be talking to God.

The only thing that stands out here is not just that He is telling us a number of different times that we need to be praying. He also adds this strength and intensity and persistence to each verb He uses for

prayer. So, He starts with just ask, ask God for what you need. Humbly come to God and tell Him what you need; just ask Him.

Second, He says, seek. Would you seek God? Really, it is this more intense pursuit of God. It is getting off your knees and going out and finding God and saying – God, this is what I need. Seek Him.

Third, He says, knock. Knock on God's door; keep knocking. It means to persist in this asking and this seeking. If God hasn't answered, go ahead and keep knocking on that door.

So, if you are a senior, graduating from high school, or you are brand new to the Austin area, and you know you need a great friend, what would Jesus tell you to do with that need? He would tell you to ask. – *God, I need a trusted friend – somebody I can walk through life with. Would You give me that? Please, would You?* – If God has not answered that prayer, He would say – *Hey, come on. Seek. Go back to God with that need.* Put yourself in a place where you can find a great friend and then say – God, here I am. Would You give me a great friend? Right here, right now, would You do that? – If that prayer is still not answered, He says, knock. – God, You know I need a friend. I am brand new to this place. Would You help me? Would You give me somebody that I can trust, someone I can share my life with, some one who will pray for me, some one I can pray for? Knock, He says.

This kind of persistent praying that Jesus says we ought to be doing, it can almost feel like you are bordering on annoying God. You just keep coming back to Him. It is like – God is going to get frustrated with me at some point. But that kind of persistent prayer that borders on annoying God, that is exactly the kind of prayer that Jesus says we ought to be praying.

Seminary professor Walter Weed, says: “The fawning etiquette of unctuous or flattering prayer is utterly foreign to the Bible. Biblical prayer is impertinent, persistent, shameless, and decorous. It is more like haggling in an oriental bazaar than the polite monologues of the churches.”

Have you ever haggled in a bazaar? You know just how shameless and persistent you have to be, if you have.

A number of years ago, I was in China and I did some haggling in a bazaar. I found a cross at this Chinese bazaar and I didn't even know they made crosses in China. Apparently, they do. I found this cross and I have a close friend who collects crosses. I wanted that cross. It was \$5 and I had been told before going into this bazaar, you never buy anything at face value. So I started the negotiations. I grabbed the cross. I only had \$3 in my pocket and the thing cost \$5. I said: \$2, I will give you \$2 right now for this cross. They said: No. I said: All right, \$2.25. I will give you \$2.25 right now for this cross. He said: \$4.75. So I turned around and walked away. I stayed away a couple of minutes and made sure he didn't see me. I came back in and said: All right. I will give you \$2.75 for this cross. He said: No, \$4.25

and I am not going any lower than \$4.25. So I turned around and walked away again. I hid out of sight for about five minutes and waited. I came back and grabbed the cross and threw my \$3 down and told him, You have a deal. He just looked at me, stared at me, and we had this awkwardly long period of silence. Then he said: Fine, just get out of here. – So I did, with my \$3 cross, I walked out of that bazaar.

Jesus says: Ask, seek, knock. Come on, be persistent. Be shameless. Really, haggle with God. It is fine. You can try to annoy God. Go for it. See if you can. You won't. See if you can annoy God. --- That is how persistent He wants our praying to be.

After Jesus made this point, then he gets into that theology that is messed up, the theology that is really keeping them from really praying with this kind of persistence and maybe is keeping us from praying with this kind of persistence. He says: What is wrong with their theology is that they did not really believe that God was all that good. So Jesus tells them: God is a good God and He gives good gifts. He really does. So whatever you have, whatever you need, whatever is on your heart, bring that to Him because He is a good God. He wants to give you good things.

Matthew 7:9-11 “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!”

See, we should persistently pray to God and ask God for what we need because He is a good God and He gives good gifts. Jesus promises that is the case.

He makes His points pretty simply. He makes this assumption that you parents out there, you know how to give good gifts to your kids. So, parents, let me ask you a question. When your kids were young, and they were going to bed, and they asked for milk before bedroom. Did you ever lace their milk with cyanide before giving it to them? No! Of course you didn't. Or, when your daughter turned 16 and you bought her her first car, did you sneak out to the garage before she ever had a chance to drive it and cut the brake lines? Did you do that? No, of course you didn't!

Jesus said: Though you are evil, though you sin, though you make foolish decisions, you know how to give good gifts to your kids. You are really good at that. So how about God? How about your heavenly Father? He is not evil at all. In fact, He is the definition of good. We know what good is because of who God is. So if He is perfectly perfect, He must give perfectly perfect gifts. He gives really good gifts.

So it is ridiculous to think that we would not keep praying and praying and praying some more to God, right? If we truly believed and we truly understood that God is good and that He gives really good

gifts, you would not be able to stop us from praying. We would start and end our day with prayer. We would have a lot of our energy expended on talking to God. We would not have to wait until we felt like it; we would feel like it all the time. We would not have to try. It would just come naturally. It would come easily and freely to us. We certainly would not be able to call prayer a spiritual discipline any longer. It would take about as much discipline to pray as it would to redeem a winning lottery ticket. It would take as much discipline to pray as it would to turn in a final exam at the end of class when you knew every single answer. Those things don't take discipline. They only hold benefit for you. You would not be able to stop us from praying if we really believed that God is good and that He only gives good gifts.

So, what God is doing is waiting, just waiting for us to ask. He really is. Because He cannot wait to give us good gifts. He can't wait for us to come to Him and ask and seek and knock, knowing that He will only give us good things. That is all He will give us. So he says: Come on, let me in there. I can help you with this. Please, just ask Me.

I know it is a bit crass and irreligious but if you ever watch professional tag team wrestling, you have seen this happening. A guy is in the ring and he is getting a beat down. What is his teammate doing? He is outside of the ropes and he is reaching in there saying: Come on, man. Tag me. Let me in there. I will help you. You just have to tag me.

That is what God is doing. He is waiting on the outside of these ropes and that is what He is saying to us. Come on, I am right here. Would you just tag me? Let me in. I will help you with this. I have good things for you. I will help you. – Because He is a good God and He gives good gifts. He is just waiting for us to ask.

My wife and I, after we had our first kid, were trying to have another little one. My wife, without telling me, started praying that God would either give us twins or a girl. We got pregnant and guess what we had? We had twins. After we got pregnant with twins, Dayna said; By the way, I don't know if I told you this, but I have been praying God would give us twins. I said: Dayna, could you let me know these kinds of things before you start praying them? At least, I could start praying against you if nothing else. Really, we have two human beings now that we are responsible for the rest of our lives. We got pregnant again after that and guess what we have that time – a girl. Twins and a girl – just like Dayna prayed. The problem with my wife is that she believes Jesus. She believes God is good and that He gives good gifts. He just wants to be asked and so that is what she did. And He answered.

So, where are you? What do you need:? What is on your heart? What is giving you a beat down? What is exhausting you? God says: Come on. Bring that to Me. Just tag Me. Let me in there. I want to help.

So, if you are in a dating relationship right now and feeling maybe the next step is marriage but you are uneasy about that. You are stressed out about the decision. You are not sure exactly what God wants in that relationship. Would you ask God to get in there and to help you with that decision? He will help you.

Or, if you are at odds with someone at work or at school or at home, and you are in this conflict and you don't know how to get out of it. You don't know the next step to make this thing right. Would you seek God out about that? He will help you figure out what the next step is to make this thing right.

If you keep getting angry with your spouse and your kids and you have been trying so hard to stop but will power is not getting you there, would you knock? Would you keep knocking? Would you say: God, please, take this anger away from me. Would You do that? God is just waiting for you to ask. He cares a lot more about getting rid of that anger than you do.

Or, if you are hurting financially and there is something you need that you can't afford, would you ask? Really, He cares about sleeping bags in Houston and He cares about whatever you need that you cannot afford. Just ask Him. He cares about the small stuff and the big stuff. Or if you have been out of a job for a while and you have been looking and you just can't find anything, would you seek God out about that? Say: God, would You please open a door for me? Would You help me to find something to afford to live if nothing else.

If you have a kid who has been walking away from God for a while and is distant from God, maybe antagonistic towards Him, come on and knock, keep knocking on that door. God wants to get in there and help. He really does. Would you keep knocking, even if you have been praying for that thing for a very long time?

You see, what Jesus wants us to do is just ask Him to help all the time. Ask, seek, knock – trust Me. I am a good God and I give very good gifts. I just need you to trust Me.

Yet, I know some of you have been praying for something for years now. God has not answered. As far as you can tell, this is something that would be in God's will and something that is good. You can't figure out why God is not answering. You are confused. You read Matthew 7 and you are frustrated. There are a lot of factors involved in a situation like that. It can be quite complex. One thing I can definitely tell you is that as a good father, God is always behind the scenes working on your behalf -- even when all that you hear and see and sense is silence, is nothing. He is working on your behalf.

About five years ago, Dayna and I started praying for reconciliation in a relationship very close to us. It was a family member of Dayna's. Five years ago, we started praying really hard for reconciliation and we knew that this thing was really, really broken. If anything was going to change in this relationship, it was going to have to be because God got in there and started mixing things up. That was the only way things were going to get better. So, we just kept praying. We kept asking; we kept seeking; we kept knocking. Five years later now, just two weeks ago, we finally found a reconciliation in this relationship. It was an incredible moment. What was so awesome about it was that what we found out is that five years before, this family member of Dayna's met a fourth person. God introduced them to a fourth person that ended up growing a friendship with this family member. It was this fourth person that God used five years later to finally convince this family member to make reconciliation happen with Dayna and me. We just sat back and grinned and laughed and had a great time seeing how God had been working over those five years.

He is a good Father, right? He is always working behind the scenes, even when all that you hear is silence. He is always back there working. He is always working on your behalf because He is a good God and He only gives good gifts. That is what He promises.

So what are you going to do tomorrow? Are you going to ask? Are you going to seek? Are you going to knock? Look, He won't give you a snake. He is not going to give you a rock.

Why don't we start that right now? Whatever God has put on your heart, whatever it is that you need to keep praying about and keep asking Him about – why don't you take a moment and ask Him about that right now. Seek Him; knock on His door.

As the ushers come forward, and you take a few moments to do that, I will close us in prayer.

Father,

You are so good and You give very good gifts. Lord, I ask that You not let me or anyone else here today get away with believing anything less about You. More importantly, I pray that we would just keep coming back to You with what we need, that we would keep asking and seeking and knocking and that we would know that You are a loving Father who loves to take care of your kids. Would You help us to trust that? Would you help us to trust You? We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen