

Our Lord's Three Imperatives of Prayer ■ Ask, Seek, Knock

by Tim Conway

This sermon emphasizes the importance of fervent and persistent prayer, highlighting the need for believers to ask, seek, and knock continuously in their prayer lives. The speaker urges the congregation to prioritize prayer meetings and to be devoted to seeking God's presence through prayer, emphasizing that a church's spiritual condition can be accurately gauged by its prayer meetings.

Scripture: Matthew 7:7, Acts 1:14, James 5:16, Luke 18:1, Hebrews 4:16, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Topics: "Fervent Prayer", "Devotion to Seeking God"

Description

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Transcript

Probably the most well-known statement our Lord ever made with regards to prayer. Verse 7, Ask and it will be given to you, Seek and you will find, Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, And the one who seeks finds, And to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? Now you all may remember that there is a very similar portion of Scripture in Luke chapter 11. Probably a different account. Our Lord often taught similar things in different places at different times.

Notice this verse 11, If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, How much more will your Father who is in heaven give? Matthew says good things. What does Luke say? The Holy Spirit to those who ask him. Father I pray your blessing over your word at this time.

And among this people. For your glory, for your honor, for your truth's sake. Amen.

So my title is Our Lord's Three Imperatives of Prayer. Three verbs, Ask, Seek, Knock. Now this may mean nothing to you.

But if I told you these three verbs are imperative, Well that ought to mean something. It means it's imperative that you do this. If I tell you that it's actually in the present tense, A present tense imperative is something that isn't that which you do just one time.

It's ongoing. It's something that you keep on doing. And it's emphatic.

Which that's got to do with placement. That means there's emphasis. Emphatic.

This is important. You know what this is? If our Lord wanted to say to you, I don't want you just to ask and seek and knock. I want you to keep doing it the rest of your life.

I want you to do it and do it and do it and keep doing it. This is the way you would say it. This is the form of verb that you would use.

Now look, if you're sitting here and you have any care or concern about the Lord Jesus Christ actually being Lord and giving you instruction about the way to live your Christian life, then you don't want to ignore this. What he wants, and you know what else you see here? There's progression. This is a progressive sequence here.

This, each verb ramps up to the next. You ask, don't stop asking, but go beyond that. There needs to be an intensification.

You need to take it to another level. Step it up. Be more forceful and seek.

But then you don't want to stop there. You want to heat things up more. You want to redouble your effort.

And you want to knock. You even want to pound. Perseverance.

There is perseverance here. But even more than that, there's this ascending scale. And I just ask you this.

I mean, look, brethren, I'll tell you this. If you want to live this life and you want to live it well and you want to live it in the power of God and you want to live it receiving the blessings that God has for people that ask like this, you don't want to just sidestep this. Like yawn, this doesn't really apply to my life.

This doesn't really matter. Brethren, this matters. I ask you this.

Does this describe your prayer life? If we were basically to take a snapshot of the last week of your life, would Jesus say, not any of us, would He say, because He's going to be the one that you stand before in the end and He's going to look at your life under the microscope. If He did that today over the last week, from last Lord's Day to this Lord's Day, would your life be a reflection of this? Of asking and even more seeking and even more knocking and not just doing it a little bit, but this is something that you keep on doing. Would that be descriptive of your life? If not, I just ask you to lend me your ear for the next few minutes.

Now, first thing I want to deal with here is the encouragement. Let's just ask a question. What is the greatest possible encouragement to ask? No, I wouldn't say that that is.

I mean, that's not a bad... I mean, look, if you've got real respect for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His Lordship and He's telling you to do this, then yes, that is a hugely significant factor. But based on what He Himself is saying here, He doesn't say, ask because I'm Lord. Why does He say you should ask? Because

you get it.

I mean, brethren, if there is any greater encouragement, there is nothing else more calculated to energize and animate your prayer life and my prayer life than the full persuasion that if I go to God and I ask and I seek and I knock, I'm going to be heard and I'm going to get what I go after. Brethren, there is no greater incentive to prayer than that right there. Six times in two verses, the living Lord Jesus Christ, He promises that a Christian's asking and seeking and knocking is not useless.

Look at this, ask. Verse 7, ask. Why should I ask? Because it'll be given to you.

You know, professing Christians who don't ask or don't ask often, what is that? That is rank unbelief in this promise. It'll be given to you. Seek.

Lord, why should I seek? Because you'll find what you're seeking. Knock. Why? That door will be opened for you that you knock on.

And then, look at this, He steps back and He takes it out of the second person, goes to the third person, and He just says very broadly, massively broad, to everyone who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, it will be opened.

Brethren, these are no small promises to God's people. In very emphatic manner, Christ seeks to remove your doubts and any question in your mind and make you confident, bold, we approach the throne. Why would we be so bold? Why do you even want to go there? Well, brethren, there's no question in these two verses, we could think of different reasons why we would want to go there to the throne of grace, but in these two verses, the primary emphasis is that we need to ask and we need to keep asking.

Why? Because there is this massive encouragement. You know what? We need this kind of encouragement. You know why? We're prone to faint.

We need to be told over and over, everyone who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, it will be opened.

We are prone to faint. You know what? Jesus is bringing out the chisel and He keeps banging it. This is the hammer blows of repetition.

Bang, bang, bang. He says, you know why you want to ask? Because if you ask, bang, you'll receive. If you seek, bang, you'll find.

You knock, bang, it'll be opened. Everybody who asks, bang, they receive. Everyone who seeks, He just keeps coming after this.

We need this because, because, because we're made of what we're made of. Notice the word, it. Ask and it will be given to you.

Now, this is, all our English translations have it. And you know, in the original language, sometimes you get the pronoun and sometimes you don't. The pronoun in the original actually isn't here, but it's implied by the verb.

But don't you love that word, it? Ask and it will be given to you. Wait, what? What's it? What is that? What that is, is this. It's another massive encouragement.

It is a beautiful word. It is a vast word. It is broad.

It is expansive. That little pronoun points to whatever you're asking for. That's what the it is.

Seems to me the it refers to everything. Listen, Jesus does not riddle these verses with a bunch of qualifiers and exceptions. This is pretty broad language.

You ought to feast on these. But I see this in the context. Notice verse 11.

If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him? Do you see what the it is that we receive? Our Father is going to give us good things. If what we're asking for is a good thing, we're going to get that good thing. Our Father is not in the business of giving us bad things.

That's right here. That's in the context. You need to see that.

I take this to mean that if one of God's children will ask their heavenly Father for something, and if the it they are asking for fits that description right there, if it's a good thing. And by the way, you don't just ask for it. Remember, this thing is present tense.

It means you keep asking for it and it's progressive. You don't just ask. You keep seeking and you keep knocking and you keep going after this.

Then you're going to have what you're asking for. Now, here's the thing. He's obviously means that you don't always get it the first day you ask for it.

Why does he tell us to keep and pursue and continue and go on and seek and ask and knock and keep going? Because sometimes you may have to pray for what you're praying for for a year before it comes. Now, look, he knows what we're made of. He's not mocking us with this.

He knows our lives are limited. He knows our days are short. Brethren, sometimes it seems really long and we get discouraged when it hasn't really been that long.

I have seen this as a pastor. We come into the prayer meeting and you throw something out. Everybody prays for it that Wednesday.

And then you know what? Maybe somebody will pray for it two weeks down the road. But after that, it's gone. People just forget.

People run out of gas. People run out of steam. Brethren, I'll tell you this.

Coming together with the FBC guys just this last Thursday. You know what? Two things the other pastors prayed for that I didn't even ask prayer for. They prayed for my daughter Charity and they prayed that... Brethren, they keep asking that God would give us a building.

Even when I'm kind of almost ashamed to keep asking them. They keep going there. Brethren, it will be given.

We have such a Father who is never going to give us a bad thing. He gives us good things. And I'll tell you this.

Don't think it's a bad thing because you ask for it 20 times, 200 times, 2,000 times and you don't have it yet. Sometimes we're led to believe that. Well, it must be a bad thing because God hasn't given to... Wait, that's not... Jesus didn't say to ask.

He said, you keep on asking. You keep on asking. And like I say, He knows what we're made of.

Here's the question. How can we know when something's a good thing? One, if God promises it. Bank on it.

If God promises... Think about the parallel text. If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask? Guess what? He'll give you the Holy Spirit if you ask. And that's a good thing.

That's one of the best things. So ask for that. You know one of the promises you hear me bring up on a regular basis to believers? The works that Christ did we will do in greater works.

You know what? If God promises us that, then you don't give Him any, any rest with regards to it. You know what God said? He said, you pray to the Lord of the harvest. Want for labors.

You know what? We can pray for Him for that. We know He's going to give them. There are certain things in Scripture that you just absolutely know that God is going to give.

You know what Scripture says? Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to what? Do you know what we're predestined for? To be conformed to the image of Christ. You want to know something that God will grant you? Christian, you are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Do you think if you ask Him to conform you more to that image, He'll do it? Guess where that happens most of the time? In the fire.

Right? He purifies the sons of Levi. He likes to put His silver in the fire. So just know this, when you ask to be more like Christ, what you're really asking is for the engine on your car to blow up or something like that.

You say, that isn't really what I was asking for. I asked the Lord that I might grow. Have you ever sung that? You know what He said? I thought just, you know, some magical season would come and I would just all of a sudden magically be more like Christ.

And He said, that's not what happens. But brethren, it's not a bad thing to pray. It's a good thing to pray.

But here's a point. Can you know a good thing? Yes, if God promised it. How about this? You can know a good thing if you ask for it and God refuses it.

You say, what do you mean? I'm not saying that the thing you asked for was good. I'm saying it wasn't good. But you end up knowing whether it was good or bad.

You see, here's an example. Jesus said, Father, take this cup away from me. Did God do it? And see, once He passed through those waters, you knew God didn't answer.

How about this? David fasted and prayed that God would spare the child. Did God spare the child? And see, once the child's dead, you know what the answer is. Or how about this? I prayed three times that God would take the thorn in the flesh away.

Did God take it away? How did he know? God actually spoke to him. You say, well, should we expect that God's going to speak to us? Listen, God has many ways to speak to His children. It doesn't have to be audible.

There are ways that He convinces us what we're asking for is not a good thing. But brethren, what about everything else? What about all the other its? I mean, what about the things that are not directly promised in Scripture, but He hasn't yet refused? What about Sandra's twin boys? What about that? What about our asking for a church building? What about God giving this church its first missionary? What about God saving Muslims? I mean, what about something that you greatly desire? Maybe you want a child. Maybe you want a spouse.

Maybe you want a house. Maybe you want a job. What about these things? You just don't have any specific promise for it.

Will He give it to you? Is it a good thing? Think with me. Think with me here. Take, for instance, my son Joshua.

My wife and I, we pleaded with the Lord to save our son. Did we have a specific promise from Scripture? Not a specific one. Not at all.

And you know what? If while we were praying, during that season we were praying, our son, on a wet day, in rush hour, out on the interstate highway, 70 mile an hour, and he's probably going faster. He spun out. Ten lane interstate highway.

God had it during rush hour. There was a gap in the traffic. If that gap hadn't been there and he'd slammed against the wall and died, guess what? We would have known.

I mean, God would have answered in the negatory. But that isn't what happened. I mean, the reality is that He ended up saving our son.

And as long as our son had life, we kept praying. Why? Even though we had no specific promise from God, we kept praying. Why? Well, because a promise is just like this.

Ask and it will be given to you. It doesn't say to ask only for what God has specifically promised in His Word. It doesn't say that.

And so we kept asking. And we kept asking and asking and asking. And like I said before, Jesus does not riddle this with all sorts of qualifiers and exceptions and terms and narrow conditions and reservations.

This is broad promises. Everyone who asks receives. He purposely made it that broad, that beautiful, that glorious.

I mean, this is not given to us so that in any way we would think anything other than we have a heavenly Father who is magnanimous and generous and overflowing in His willingness to shower answers of prayer upon His people. No one can read these two verses and come away just thinking, well, this is the talk of a stingy God who seldom gives, reluctantly gives, who likes to perpetually disappoint His people. That is not what you find here.

Brethren, based on the promises like we have in these two verses, Ruby and I kept asking and we kept asking and we kept asking. We kept asking other people, please pray for our son. People from all over the

world would tell us they were praying for our son.

And you know, now we're in the exact same place with our daughter Charity. And when are we going to quit? We're not going to quit. We're not going to quit until we die, she dies, or God saves her.

I mean, why? We have this promise. Ask and it will be given to you. Everyone who asks receives.

It's all encouragement. Do you find any discouragement here to prayer? I don't. So, what about this? Let's be honest.

Because you know what? Our God never wants us to be dishonest about these things. We ought to be able to look these things full in the face. What if we say, these verses just don't really tally with my experience.

What if we say, I look around and I see that God gives all sorts of things to people who don't ask. I see people everywhere getting on just fine without prayer. In fact, they get a lot of things I don't get and I pray.

I mean, what about that? I see people who get the very same thing with no prayer that I get by prayer. I prayed God would help me to pass that driving test. But you know what? There were unbelievers taking that driving test.

They passed and they weren't praying. I can think of at least one sister who is praying and didn't pass. And what about all that? I mean, we're asking for things.

Some Christians who do pray, I mean, well, think about this. You get lost women out there, prayerless women in the world. They don't pray.

They don't ask God. They have babies. They have very healthy babies.

Others, they're not praying. They have unhealthy babies. Others who don't pray, they don't have any baby, even though they want one.

And then you take Christian women and you find exactly the same thing. You find Christian women who pray to have a child and they get one, and it's healthy. Others, they pray for one and it's not healthy.

Others, they pray for them and God doesn't give them. So does this really tally with our experience? I mean, we have to be honest about this. You find lost men out there.

They get jobs. You see lost farmers. They're raising their crops.

They're raising their sheep. They don't pray. It seems like the rain falls on their fields just as well as it falls on the Christian's fields.

In fact, God says that. He causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust, and the just are praying and thanking God for it and the unjust aren't. And so does this really make a difference? I mean, what do we say to this? And I said, and I asked, I mean, I'm asking myself that.

How do you answer that question? And brethren, it will only seem this way to you if all you're asking for is the same things that the world desires. Say, what do you mean? I mean, look, if you want money, the world wants money. If you want money and the world wants money, yeah, you'll recognize they get money and they don't pray.

I pray and I didn't get as much money as they do. So where's the answer to the prayer? They get nicer houses than I get. See, but if you just leave it at that level, you know what Jesus said right before this? Jesus said all those things the Gentiles seek after.

Ah, he was talking about clothing, he was talking about food, but you know what? Basically, these worldly things. He said to the Christians, seek first the kingdom of God. Brethren, let me ask you something.

Let's think about good things, really good things, like the Holy Spirit. Brethren, do you know those unpraying people out there? They don't have the Holy Spirit. They don't have salvation.

They don't have what the Christian has. And so, I just want to say this, brethren. The Christian will be asking for and valuing the things that the rest of the world doesn't pray for.

You see, we're asking and getting things that the world isn't even asking for. What do we ask for? Think about the things we ask for. Think of the needs of your own life.

Brethren, if all you're praying for is the very things that the world desires, you're not even, you're not seeking first the kingdom. Brethren, think about the needs that you have in this church. Think about the needs you have in your own life.

Think about the needs you have in your family. That's what you want to think about. Think about the cause of world missions.

Think about the needs they have over in Myanmar. Think of the needs, the lost children. Just the Manchester, the darkness here.

Our need of unity in this church. Our need of love in this church. Our need to have our faith increased.

Sanctification, revival, kingdom usefulness. Our needs are deep. In many cases, gospel success or gospel failure rides on the Lord moving or not moving.

That's just a reality. But heaven and hell hang in the balance. Life and death.

You see, brethren, we're praying for things that the world doesn't even think to pray about. We're praying for things that the world doesn't get and that they have no knowledge of. They have never received.

If all we do is keep our observations on the level of the physical, well then yes, you may look at this and you may look around and say, no, I don't really see that this matters or that this... Do you know what the scripture says? It says we should be blessing God. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And you can go down there through Ephesians and just knock those off one after another.

The things that God has given to his people that he has not given. Brethren, do you realize that we have asked for things and we have received things starting by calling on the Lord in the very beginning. You know what it says? He bestows his riches upon all who call upon him.

Given inheritance. They don't have that. You have a hope of heaven.

They don't have that. They have a hope. It's a false hope.

You have Christ. He's yours. I am his and he is mine.

You possess the Holy Spirit. You possess a degree of sanctification already. You possess such things.

So we don't want to get in that place where we're kind of like the psalmist. Brethren, we need to be careful how we view the lost. Remember the psalmist? I was envious.

I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Fat and sleek. Not in trouble as others are.

Not stricken. You see what it's occurring to him? Hey, what about my prayers? I mean, I'm a child of God. You're my Father.

I'm calling upon you. I look out there at the lost people and I just see, look at them slick, fat. It seems like everything goes okay.

I mean, I'm praying and look what I get. Oh, do you know what you have they don't have? You have a very particular love. And you are the apple of his eye.

And you are his. And he's watching you. And he knows everything about your life.

He is very close to you. He is very aware. And he would give you things or not give you things based on what he sees to prepare you most perfectly to dwell forever with him.

You see, the psalmist said, they're not in trouble as others. They're not stricken. Always at ease.

And they're increased in riches. All in vain. Have I kept my heart clean? You know what you might put in there? All in vain did I ask.

And I sought. And I knocked. I pounded on the gates of heaven.

And look, this guy over here. I wanted twins. Look at this lady over here.

She doesn't pray at all. She's got children coming out of her ears. I mean, brethren, that's a reality.

We look around and we see that. But you know what? We're not the only ones that see that. The psalmist saw that too.

And he's not the only one that was tempted to not think right. We are too, brethren. And he said, all in vain I've kept my heart clean, washed my hands in innocence.

For all the day long I've been stricken and rebuked every morning. See, I'm getting a raw deal. I'm getting hard things.

I mean, look all they get. They're not even praying and God just heaps stuff on them. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

Until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places.

You make them fall to ruin. How they're destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by tears. I was brutish and ignorant.

And that's what we are when we think like that. I was like the beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you.

They don't have that. God is our God. You hold my right hand.

They don't have that. You guide me with your counsel. And afterward you will receive me to glory.

They don't have that. But brethren, let me tell you something. Our heavenly father gave us these promises.

And you know what? Very often the things we plead for, he is pleased. But you see, God's doing something different with his children than he's doing with the rest of the world. Oftentimes he doesn't give us things until we're ready to receive them.

Brethren, there is a real truth to not being ready. I prayed for a wife as soon as I got married. It was three years.

I wasn't ready. Ruby might question whether I was even ready after three years. But the truth is that a lot of times we're not ready yet.

Why? Because we haven't come to the place. So much of God's delays have to do with what God is doing and how he's changing us and what he wants us to learn in that whole seeking process. Brethren, you never want to get away from this.

Jesus says everyone who asks receives. I mean receive. That has to do with getting what we need to meet our needs.

Prayer is a great thing for a needy people. Receiving or not receiving, hang in the balance. James said it.

You do not have because you do not ask. Jesus never taught us that it doesn't matter whether we ask or we don't ask. That you're going to get it or not get it because God's sovereign and it doesn't really matter whether you ask.

He never taught that. He never taught that. Brethren, you know, you want to think too.

We're entirely different than the world out there who may, you know, God's kindness meant to lead them to repentance. But for us, brethren, we pray because our eyes have been opened to things that the world can't see. I mean the first beatitude in this Sermon on the Mount sets the tone.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. It's one of the things, brethren, this is not a small thing. When God saves us, he breaks our pride.

He causes us to see that without him, we're dead in the water. And that's no small thing. You see, that's behind our continuing to ask and seek and pray.

Because God has taught us something that the world, it's just as true of them. But in their pride, their arrogance, their haughtiness, they don't, they won't accept that. You see, God has opened our eyes.

Oh, I know we're still too full of ourselves. But the reality is, asking is for a desperate people, recognizing their own personal spiritual bankruptcy. And that is such a kindness of God to open our eyes to that.

Because it's true. It's true of every single human being. But you know what makes us Christians in this room different than the vast majority of all the people in this world, excluding other Christians, is that they don't have a perception of this.

Brethren, the truth is, such people as us, we ought to be really ready and hungry and eager to ask God for help. And thankful to be able to knock on the gates of heaven. What does the Lord require of you and me as Christians? What does he require of us? I'll tell you what he requires.

He wants us to be holy. He wants us to be meek, truthful, upright, pure, selfless. Submissive to him.

Are any of you there yet? Any of you met that? Well, brethren, see, these are the things. The Gentiles seek after those things. Seek first the spiritual things.

You know what we ought to be praying for as much as any? See, sometimes we can get to where we're praying for a job, we're praying for a house, we're praying for something physical. And we become so consumed with that and so locked in that. Brethren, the reality is we need to be seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

One of the things we ought to be seeking all the time, Lord, cause our church to have unity. Cause our faith to grow. Lord, help us to be more humble.

Help us to be meek. Help us to be more full of love. Help us to have a longing in our hearts for the lost and the perishing.

Help us to have that. Lord, do that. If you're lacking any of these things, then ask and it will be given to you.

Jesus says you're going to receive. Brethren, there's more here. I mean, one of the things that you recognize is this.

That when I want God to save my son Joshua, now it's charity. And I go to him all the time. Brethren, don't you realize what's happening? The massive obsession in my mind isn't charity.

It becomes the Lord himself. You see, brethren, we have to remember what all this is about. We strive after this perseverance and desperation and prayer for what it is.

I mean, brethren, all of this has to do with just a burning pursuit of God. That's what this really is. I mean, when we're banging on that door, it's not so much that behind that door is the salvation of charity.

It's behind that door is God. That's who I'm after. I need Him.

I need to cling to Him. I need to find Him, our Father in Heaven. You know this, brethren.

You know this. Our God wants intimacy with us. This is eternal life.

It's that we know Him. And you know what He wants to have happen? You know why He often delays in giving? Because in our desperation, what it causes us to do. Brethren, one of the great reasons for God bringing trials in your life, you know what? When you're too comfortable and you're too fat and too slick and too much money in the bank account, you know what happens? You forget God.

You're not communing with Him the same. Let Him bring a trial in your life, and you know what happens? Your prayers become desperate. You run to Him over and over and over and frequently.

And you see, that's what He wants. He is after this very thing. This constant growing intimacy with Him.

Keeping close company with prayer is nothing other than keeping close company with this Father of glory. Brethren, that's Christian, Christian. A reluctance on your part to be in the presence of God.

What is that? And that's a terrible thing. And you know what? We have many professing Christians. They love to hear about God.

They'll sit in the preaching. They can talk about God. But where are the men and women that long to dwell in His presence and to speak with Him? Brethren, this is biblical Christianity.

This isn't just, you know, the apostles and Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones praying Christians. Jesus is speaking to the average Christian here. So, here's a question.

How do you ascend? How do you go from just asking to seeking and knocking? How do you step it up? Well, it might be frequency. It might be like we did with Joshua in Now Charity. You ask as many people in as many places to pray.

That's one way to step it up. Because do you remember what Jesus said? He said, where two are agreed. He said, they'll have what they ask for.

His Father will give it. So, one of the things you want to find is you want to really get a request. This is one of the reasons why I am confounded at times by the lack of prayer requests here.

During the prayer meeting. I mean, I guess I just have enough decades behind me of watching God answer prayers. That I know some of you have really big needs.

And you don't bring those needs up every week. And I don't know if you're not wanting to be selfish. And you're not wanting to just wear us out with your requests.

But look, if you've got a lost spouse, lost child. If you've got great needs in your life. If you've got health issues.

If you've got child issues. And I can tell you, I have been in prayer meetings in the years before. Where you had the same people.

And they kept asking for the same things. And it was just over and over and over until God gave it. And there were things we prayed for for years and years and years.

And even to this day, the prayers haven't come. And if you want to ascend, here's what you want to do. If you want to step it up, you don't just ask.

You keep asking. If you want to step it up, you don't just keep asking. You ask other people to keep asking.

You want to step it up? Start doing this. Start studying the character of God. And remind God of His character.

Look at His names. Do you know the names of God mean something? Like Jehovah-Jireh? Lord, why would you be called Jehovah-Jireh? Does anybody know what Jehovah-Jireh means? If God actually is going to set Himself forth in Scripture as a provider, then take Him up on it. You know what? Remind Him of what He's done in your own life in times past.

Remind Him of what He's done in the lives of other people in times past. Remind Him, like Moses did, of what the Gentiles will say. What the Egyptians will say if God doesn't come through.

Remind Him of that. You really want to step it up? Study the character. Study the promises.

Oh, if there's a powerful way with God, remind Him of what He Himself has said. You want to step it up? Don't just pray privately. Pray in the family.

You want to step it up? Just don't pray in the family. Pray in the prayer meeting. I mean, brethren, these are ways that you can ascend from asking to seeking to knocking.

Brethren, I want to just say this. Practically, this looks like something. You say, what do you mean? If a person is living this out, where their life is really one of asking, and they keep asking, and seeking, and they keep it, and it's being amped up and ramped up, this looks like something.

This looks like they're living it out. You know people that ask and keep asking? That's prevalent in their life. It's real.

A life that is like that is really a life that's like that. There's a persistence before the throne of grace. You stay at it.

You continue to pray and faint now. That's what Jesus said. Jesus was teaching that in Luke 18.

Men are always to pray and not faint. And you know why he says it? Because we have a tendency to faint. You don't want to faint, brethren.

You want to keep going with this. Why? Because those who ask receive. Those who don't give up.

I'm telling you, brethren, people, God's people that pray more, they see more answers to prayer. Churches that pray more, they end up being used of God in greater ways. They see God act in greater ways.

You can count on that based on these promises. There's a persistence in all of this. You stay at it.

You don't give up. You don't slack off. You press into the inner space.

You look for ways to intensify your asking. What's the opposite of this? What's the opposite of asking and seeking and knocking? You could say not doing it. Apathy.

You just don't feel anything. Neglect. Carelessness.

Indifference. A prayer life like we're talking about here is not accidental. See, if you say, well, you know, God's got to do... Brethren, I'll tell you this.

Jesus is appealing to you. When He uses imperatives, He doesn't say, well, God is sovereign and so sit there. That's not what an imperative means.

An imperative means you have a responsibility and God's expecting you to do that. No, you do it in His strength. You do it in His power.

You're asking for Him to help. You're asking... But brethren, a prayer life like this is not accidental. It's not just occasional, casual, random.

Look at your prayer life. Your prayer life looks like something. The question is, does it look like this? I mean, there's a way your prayer life really is.

That you have a certain level of passion about it, a consistency. What Jesus is saying is that when you look at your prayer life, there should be this kind of pattern there that actually looks like you are seeking after something. You're known as people who pound on the gates of heaven.

That's the idea. Something that actually resembles what He's saying here. Praying like this looks different from not praying like this.

Don't play at prayer, brethren. The promises are too massive to do that. Listen to what D.A. Carson says.

I want to quote this to you because I think it's... I think it's spot on. Carson says, The Western world... That's the UK, the US, Europe. The Western world is not characterized by prayer.

By and large, to our unspeakable shame, even genuine Christians in the West are not characterized by prayer. Our environment loves hustle and bustle, smooth organization, powerful institutions, human self-confidence and human achievement, new opinions, novel schemes, and the Church of Jesus Christ has conformed so thoroughly to this environment that it's often difficult to see how it differs in these matters from contemporary paganism. There are, of course, exceptions, but I'm referring to what is characteristic.

Our low spiritual ebb... Now, this you want to get. Our low spiritual ebb is directly traceable to the flickering feebleness of our prayers. You do not have because you do not ask.

Brethren, I'll tell you this, you've got to prioritize because the truth is the time you're spending in prayer, you're not doing other things. You've got to bypass other things in your life that you might rather be doing, that might be more enjoyable to be doing. I mean, sitting down and eating, that might be a whole lot nicer and appealing to the flesh than a day of prayer and fasting.

I mean, yeah, I understand that. I understand. Brethren, you will not prioritize this unless you are absolutely convicted and convinced that you absolutely, desperately need God to survive and that we really need God if this church is going to rise above mundane, ordinary, average, or that you're going to actually see things happen in your life.

Coasting isn't going to work. Brethren, you will not pray like this unless you are absolutely convinced that you need God this desperately. Now, I'm going to end with this.

If up till now you wondered, well, he said he was going to step on some toes. Okay, brethren, like I say, I cannot offer an apology for what I'm about to say. Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, not Iscariot, the son of James, all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.

Now, you want to get that, devoted. What does it mean to be devoted to a wife? What does it mean to be devoted to your country? You know, that looks like something. A man devoted to his wife, it doesn't mean that he's with her every single minute of the day, but it certainly looks like something.

You know what these early men of the church were devoted to? Prayer together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers. Here's what it says in Acts 2. They, those early Christians,

devoted, there you have it again, themselves, apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers. It doesn't just say prayer singular with no article.

It says the prayers. You know what that refers to? Appointed times of prayer. Now, brethren, the New Testament is full of corporate prayer.

You simply cannot read the book of Acts without recognizing that prayer meetings were normative in the early church. Now, brethren, I have been here now since January. I've been here for nine months.

I see something here that I honestly don't understand. You guys, half the church has conveniently figured out how to absence themselves from the prayer meeting. Scripture says not to forsake the assembly together.

It doesn't just say on the Lord's day. Brethren, listen to this. R.A. Torrey.

We're too busy to pray, and so we're too busy to have power. You know what I recognize? It's very easy to say, well, we've got little children, so only mom's going to go tonight. Very convenient for dad.

Kind of almost a relief. Listen, brethren, I'll tell you this. I have found throughout my life that oftentimes the devil can be whispering in my ear and give me 10,000 reasons why prayer meeting tonight is not a good idea.

But I can also tell you this. It's just like with evangelism. When I walk away from almost every single prayer meeting I've ever been involved with in my entire life, I am glad.

I am refreshed. I feel like I feel thankful that I was able to be there. I've heard other Christians speak the same way.

Brethren, don't forsake the assembly together of yourself. You want to be prayerless? You're going to be powerless. Torrey says, we have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little.

Many services, few conversions. Much machinery, few results. Listen to Spurgeon.

We shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians. A.T. Pearson, who preached Spurgeon's funeral, he said, there has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer. This church, right at this time, you're making decisions.

Let me ask you this. And you know, I'll just say this. Before I was a pastor, I was determined.

My whole family's coming to the prayer meeting. Our children were little. You know what? If your children can't sit still in a prayer meeting, then go to the book of Proverbs and figure out how to make that happen.

Brethren, you say, when our children were in private school, when they were homeschooled, we made every prayer meeting. Whole family, all the children. Brethren, if you feel like, well, you know, we have to get up early in the morning, well then take it to the Lord, just like Daniel and his friends who said, feed us that, don't feed us the king's food, feed us this food over here and see it in the end if we're not healthier.

I would say this, whatever reason that you're coming up with, now look, I know that there are health issues and I know there can be work issues. You understand, I'm not being legalistic here. I'm just saying this,

there's never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.

Listen to Spurgeon. The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. I can tell you this, this last Wednesday, two men came, myself and Tim.

If I were to judge the spiritual condition, you can say, well, there's sickness. I understand. But again, this comes back to priorities and this comes back to what I have observed ever since January, not just over the last week.

Brethren, this church is not yet thoroughly convinced about its necessity of laying hold on God. I believe that. And listen, the condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings.

So is the prayer meeting a grace-o-meter. And from it, we may judge of the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray.

And if he be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be slothfulness in prayer. Leonard Ravenhill said, the true man of God is heart sick, grieved at the worldliness of the church, grieved at the toleration of sin in the church, grieved at the prayerlessness in the church. He is disturbed that the corporate prayer meeting of the church no longer pulls down the strongholds of the devil.

Spurgeon again says, oh yes, the prayer meeting is the place to meet with the Holy Ghost. And this is the way to get his mighty power. If we would have him, we must meet in great numbers, we must pray with greater fervency, we must watch with greater earnestness, and believe with firmer steadfastness.

The prayer meeting is the appointed place for the reception of power. I have a feeling that some of the things that we're asking for as a church have not come yet, because God's work in us has to go to the place where there is a desperation for us to really realize how desperately we need him. Brethren, if you get to the place where you really want to see your charity saved, your father saved, your mother saved, absenting yourself from the prayer meetings is not what you want to do.

You want to make it a priority. Listen, I recognize you may have to work Wednesday nights. That's understandable.

You've got to provide for your families. I understand sickness can take us out. I understand a pregnancy can take us out.

I understand those things. But what I'm also watching is even when summer came and there was no more school, you didn't see an increase in the number of people in the prayer meeting. What is happening is because of children, like I say, and you know what happens? There's momentum.

The church begins to figure out reasons that are appropriate for absenting themselves from the prayer meeting. And you know what happens? It begins to multiply excuses. Well, you know, half the church doesn't go anyway.

Well, we got this. It becomes very easy. Brethren, if you're serious about taking the city of Manchester, if you're serious about revival, if you're serious about seeing changes in this country, listen to Vance Havner, one of Mac Tomlinson's favorites.

The thermometer of a church is its prayer meeting. A.W. Tozer, the creeping wilderness will soon take over that church that trusts in its own strength and forgets to watch and pray. John Newton said, I look

upon prayer meetings as the most profitable exercises accepting the public preaching in which Christians can engage.

They have a direct tendency to kill a worldly trifling spirit and to draw down a divine blessing upon all our concerns, compose differences, and in kindle, at least maintain the flames of divine love amongst brethren. Ravenhill said, This much is sure in all churches. Forgetting party labels, the smallest meeting numerically is the prayer meeting.

If weak in prayer, we are weak everywhere. Spurgeon said, If God be near a church, it must pray. And if he be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be a slothfulness in prayer.

My brethren, if we're really going to pray and be earnest in prayer and keep praying, and if we're going to seek and keep seeking and step it up and have an intensification, and we're going to ramp this up, and we're going to redouble our effort, and we're going to pound on the gates of heaven, brethren, I'm pleading with you. This is a pastoral appeal to you. Our prayer meetings need to be full.

Bring your children. Teach your children to sit still. My brethren, if God will only persuade you of how desperate, how earnest you ought to be.

You know what the problem is, brethren? Empty prayer meetings mean we're too self-sufficient. We're not seeing the importance of this. May God grant in the name of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we repent in these areas where there is repentance needed.

The Christ who makes us pray is the one who at great, great, great, great expense to himself, he opened the way. Brethren, this is not a useless endeavor. He opened the way to the Father for us.

And what? Brethren, I know this. I can tell you this. I'm made of the same stuff.

If I wasn't pastoring, and there wasn't an expectation that I'd be here. If I had a bunch of little children, and all of a sudden, a Wednesday's coming around, it's been a long day, and it felt like, yeah, let Ruby go and I'll stay home with the kids. I mean, would that be a temptation? That would be a temptation.

And then you start seeing a bunch of other people do it. Would that be a greater temptation? That'd be a greater temptation. Listen, brethren, this has to do with prioritization.

You say, well, my children go to school in the morning. Yeah, you might be better off coming here, you and your husband, you and your wife, and praying for your children to succeed in this world the way. You see those prayers will go, God is able to do in five seconds more than you can do.

And this whole church can do in 50 years. Brethren, I just am asking you, I'm making a pastoral appeal to you to live like you really believe that. Brethren, if we need to change the prayer meeting, these things are flexible.

If we need to change the prayer meeting to 6 p.m. rather than to 7 p.m. so that people can be home by 8 p.m. I mean, we can do things like that. We can adjust times. We can adjust nights.

We can have two prayer meetings during the week to fit everybody's schedules. But I'm making an appeal here, brethren. Look, I know my Bible well enough and I know from my own pastoring what these men, Tozer, Havner, Ravenhill, A.T. Pearson, Spurgeon, what these guys are saying is true.

And Scripture will bear it up. And you cannot and do not want to try to redefine New Testament Christianity in the book of Acts as though they didn't come together in united prayer. They did.

And when Scripture says not to forsake the assembly together of yourself, you can believe that one of the meetings that Scripture very much is showing us was normative to the New Testament, was united prayer. And brethren, I hope you just heed this. I want your good.

I want the good of your families. I want the good of your children. I want the good of this church.

I want the good of this city. And I know this, we need to lay hold on God. In empty prayer meetings, what these guys are saying is right.

It speaks of a lack of health that is not, it's not good. Father, I pray that you would take these words. Lord, help us to be a church that prays and that seeks and that knocks with a kind of vehemence and intensity that you would have us as a church in united fashion.

I pray, Lord, make us a praying people. I ask you, Lord, give us a praying church. I ask you to so move in the hearts of people that we, not just this Wednesday, but in an ongoing fashion, as long as we have life and breath, that you would so move upon the hearts of these people as to make this a priority in their lives above and beyond many, many, and most other things.

I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Okay, brethren, you are dismissed.

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