

TASTING GOD'S GOODNESS MATTHEW 7:7-11

In one of his Psalms David made a simple and yet profound statement. It is actually an *exclamation* that seems to have erupted from an excitement he could not contain. “*O taste and see that the LORD is good!*” (34:8). Let me ask you, do you know how good your heavenly Father is?

Most of us know and confess that the Lord is good. When someone says, “God is good,” we are conditioned to respond, “All the time.” But it’s one thing to know and confess that God is good, it’s another thing to have tasted and seen that the LORD is good.

When you go to a nice restaurant usually the first thing you do after being seated is read the menu. Sometimes, the chef will come to your table and tell you about the special dishes the restaurant is serving that day. He or she might tell you the ingredients of those dishes and how they are prepared. They might even show you what it looks like.

That knowledge can intensify your appetite. That knowledge can make you salivate. But if you leave that restaurant without *tasting* its food you will *not* be satisfied. You will be disappointed and frustrated. Because reading the menu, hearing the chef describe what’s on the menu, even seeing the food he’s describing, is not enough. You’ve got to *taste* it. You’ve got to ingest it so that it satisfies your appetite and so you really, truly know what it’s like.

It’s the same with God’s goodness. We are told over and over in Scripture that God is good...all the time. We can know that “concept” in our heads and confess it with our mouths. But I believe the only way we can truly comprehend it is by tasting it. Not by doing a theological study from the writers of Scripture (as important and beneficial as that might be), but by *experiencing* it firsthand.

According to Jesus, the way we taste and see that the Lord is good, the way we experience His goodness firsthand, is by *asking* Him for things, just as a child asks his father for things. Because when we ask Him for things He *gives* them. And it’s when we have a personal experience with His generosity on our behalf that we taste the LORD’s goodness.

Look what Jesus says in **Matthew 7:7-8** ⁷“*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*” ⁸“*For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*”

Have you ever noticed that when Jesus talks about prayer what He says is never complicated—it’s always so simple? He doesn’t launch into a theological dissertation about God’s eternal decrees or predestination or whether the universe is opened or closed. He never explains how prayer corresponds to God’s foreknowledge or His immutable will. He simply says, “Pray!” Why? Because God is good and God loves you. And because God is good and God loves you He wants to bless you. And prayer is the means by which you receive the blessing of God. Prayer is the means by which God’s goodness and love for you becomes tangible, because it is through prayer that you get to experience the generosity of God on your behalf.

And that’s a promise. Notice, the text does not say, “Ask, and it *might* be given to you. Seek, and there’s a good chance you will find. Knock, and more than likely the door will be opened.” No. We are given the assurance that God will, in fact, respond.

That may explain why, in the Greek language, these imperatives, “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” are emphatic. We could best understand Jesus on this matter if we were to put an exclamation point at the end of each word. It’s as though Jesus were saying to us, “C’mon

people! When you have needs and concerns don't be passive! Don't just sit there wringing your hands or biting your fingernails. Your heavenly Father, who has every resource at His disposal and is incredibly generous with them, is poised to bless you! So what are you waiting for? Ask! Seek! Knock!

Paul said something similar when he admonished the Colossians to “...*be devoted to prayer*” (4:2). The Greek word translated “devoted” (proskartereo) is the strongest word in that language for commitment. It means “to latch on to something and refuse to let it go”, like a pit bull seizing a piece of meat (*Pray*, Issue 7, 1998, p.22).

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher of the 19th century, said, “Prayer pulls the rope down below and the great bell above rings in the ears of God. Some scarcely ring the bell for they pray so languidly; others give only an occasional jerk at the rope. But he who communicates with heaven is the man who grabs the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might” (Ibid).

That's not just Spurgeon's opinion. That's what Jesus tells us in **verse 8**. *⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

By the way, the tense of these verbs indicate that this is not an isolated, one time petition. It is not a couple of halfhearted raps on the door and, if no one opens it, you say, “Oh well, I guess nobody's home, I'll stop knocking.” This is continuous action. You could legitimately translate this, “Keep on asking, continue to seek, don't stop knocking until the door is opened.” Jesus is describing persistence and tenacity.

Do you want to see your needs met? Do you want to overcome some obstacle? Do you want to see real, substantial change or progress in your life or the life of a loved one? Pray. If you pray things happen; if you don't they don't. James, in a parallel passage, said, “You have *not* because you ask *not*.” And I believe the meaning of this is God does things when we pray that He otherwise would not do.

Would you take a moment to evaluate your life? What is it that you really need? What are you concerned about? Are you struggling with something? Are you stuck in some way?

Listen to the words of Jesus. “Ask!” “Seek!” “Knock!” God *wants* to help us. Why? Because we are His children, and that means we are the special objects of His delight. When a person delights in someone He wants to be generous with her—He wants to give him good things. Look at **verses 9-11**. *⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 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 good things to those who ask him!*

Last year I visited our grandchildren in Turkey four times—January, April, July, and September. I spent all four weeks of my vacation there because...where else would I want to be? On each of those trips we maxed out our allowable baggage, not just in quantity but in weight. The weight limit for each checked bags is 50 pounds, and not once did we have 49 or even 49.5. We had 50.0. By the way, not one item in those checked bags was for us—we put all of our own stuff in small bags that we could carry on the plane. Everything in the big bags, with the exception of a few small items for Grace and Lucas, were gifts for True, Echo, and Ebba.

Two months prior to each trip Mindy and I would start collecting those gifts and pile them up in a corner of our room. And often, when we would FaceTime the grandkids, we would say, “Guess what True? Guess what Echo? We got you another present today. Then

we would take our phone into the bedroom and flip it so they could see the pile of gifts.

And you know what happened? Instead of getting a phone call from Turkey every *other* day, True and Echo would call us *every* day—actually it was the very first thing they did when they got out of bed in the morning—and after just a few seconds of conversation they would say, “Grandpa, can we see the presents?”

It is an absolute delight for me to give gifts to my grandchildren, and I think you know why. They are the objects of my delight. And when a person delights in someone he wants to be generous with her—he wants to give him good things.

That is precisely what Jesus is saying about our heavenly Father. The reason prayer moves the hands of God is because we are His precious children, and as a good, loving God, there is nothing He would not do for our benefit.

I have studied and observed other religions. I’ve visited temples where the first thing worshipers do is ring a bell in order to wake their god or arouse his attention. I’ve seen worshipers who bring gifts to their temples in order to curry their gods’ favor, or go through certain rituals so these “gods” will pay attention to them.

During the time of Jesus the Greeks believed their gods made a sport of mocking those who prayed to them. They believed when a worshiper asked for a particular thing the “god” would give him something else just to spite him. Like a stone instead of bread, or a snake instead of a fish. In other words, they believed their gods were capricious and cruel.

But not so with *our* heavenly father. Our heavenly Father is not sleeping, disinterested, preoccupied, or malicious. He is not a reluctant God. He’s incredibly generous. And He is incredibly generous because He is so good.

Jesus is comparing earthly fathers with our heavenly Father to reinforce His argument that prayer is an extremely beneficial activity for children of God. His logic goes like this. Earthly fathers give their children what they ask for. If they ask for bread they give them bread. If they ask for fish they give them fish. And earthly fathers do this even though they are evil.

When Jesus calls earthly fathers evil He is talking about the sinful nature they are born with. Every person is born into this world with a propensity to be selfish and sinful. Yet Jesus says that in spite of this earthly fathers are still good to their children. They still give them good things, because they are capable of loving them. And love translates into generosity.

So if earthly fathers who by nature are evil can be generous, how much more our heavenly Father who is perfect! There is not even a hint of evil or selfishness in God. His love is pure love! His goodness is absolutely goodness. Which means that generosity and benevolence flow abundantly from Him.

Do you know how much God wants to bless you? I hope you will be convinced enough that you will be compelled to keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. Because that’s the way you tap into God’s willingness. If you pray persistently you will receive, if you don’t pray persistently you forfeit the blessings God wants to give you. It’s that simple.

I read an article in *Outside* magazine about a man who lived in Moab, Utah. “Steve Arrowsmith lived in a \$38,000 house with three rooms of flea-market furniture and a handful of cats he fed by dumping a pile of Purina onto the kitchen floor. He rigged an army poncho over his bed because he couldn’t afford to fix his leaky roof, and he acquired most of his clothes at a local thrift shop. But when the thirty year old Arrowsmith died...the victim of a severe asthma attack, people who knew him got a big surprise. He was, in fact, worth \$13 million...bequeathed to him by his family, from whom he had been estranged for years.”

(August 1998, p.32).

I don't know why this man didn't take advantage of the resources he had, but we read something like that and say, "That's a tragedy." I wonder if the angels in heaven say to themselves, "I don't know why God's people don't take advantage of the unlimited resources that are at their disposal. It's a tragedy!"

Are you aware of the resources that are available to you? And do you understand how much God wants to give them to you?

I'm not talking about acquiring earthly treasures or experiencing earthly pleasures. Those are not real riches! Sometimes those things are a curse.

I'm talking about acquiring spiritual riches. Seeing loved ones who are transformed by the Spirit of God and become new creatures in Christ. Seeing people delivered from sin's dominion and freed to live righteous lives. Seeing churches set on fire by the Holy Spirit where their members see the glory of Christ on display. Seeing communities that are infected by the grace of God.

Look at what God has done through prayer in the building ministry at Emmanuel Bible Church. No debt! On track to meet our projected expenses from four years ago! That's God!

Look at what God is doing in ELLS International through prayer. Over 1200 pastors and church leaders trained and equipped to rightly divide the Word of God in the last seven years. Eleven more African countries pleading with *ELLS International* to do this training in their countries! God has done this with a bumbling Executive Director (me!). With a poor website! With limited time and very few resources! That's God!

I want to close this morning by addressing two questions that I'm pretty sure are on some of your minds. First, why does Jesus tell us to *keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking*? Why is *persistence* in prayer necessary in order to move the hands of God?

Let me assure you that persistence is not for God's benefit. It's not because God is reluctant and needs to be convinced. It's not because He has a poor memory and needs to be reminded. We've already studied the passage on prayer in Matthew 6 where Jesus said, "*Your heavenly Father knows what you need even before you ask him.*"

Persistence in prayer is for our benefit, not God's. Persistence proves the sincerity of my desires. Sometimes my desires are impulsive. I may want something right now, and then not want it tomorrow. Years ago, I remember being at a store with one of our boys, and he saw something he wanted and begged me to get it for him. When we didn't get it for him he was devastated. Little did he know that I had Mindy buy it when he wasn't looking so we could give it to him for Christmas just a couple of months later.

When Christmas came and he opened it, I will never forget the look on his face. Pure disappointment. He looked at it as if to say, "Oh shoot! I don't want this!" And to my knowledge he never played with it once.

The fact is, my son wanted that thing badly one day, and completely forgot about it two days later, never to want it again. That's why persistence is important in prayer. It proves the sincerity of my desires.

But it also purges those desires. Sometimes my desires are selfish, or vengeful, or greedy. James tells us in his epistle, "When you ask God for things, you ask with the wrong motives, so of course He's not going to give you those things."

When we spend enough time in the presence of God over a certain matter pretty soon

we'll understand what He thinks about it. We'll begin to see that issue or problem or person from His perspective, and we will inevitably want what *He* wants. Our desires will be conformed to *His* desires, our will aligned with *His* will.

That brings me to the second question. Why are some prayers unanswered? Jesus *seems* to be saying in verse 8 that if we keep on praying we *will* get what we ask for. This statement seems like a promise. But we know God *doesn't* give us everything we ask for. We have all experienced unanswered prayer.

The fact is, sometimes we ask for things that are not are not in our best interests—things that might hinder our effectiveness or hinder our spiritual growth and maturity. I think all of us have asked, at some point in time, for God to take away our pain or our suffering or our heartache.

Paul asked the Lord three times to relieve him of a physical malady that he called “a thorn in the flesh.” And the Lord said, “No. I’ve given it to you to keep you from becoming conceited. I’ve given it to you to show that my grace is sufficient. I’ve given it to you to keep you weak, because when you are weak, then I am strong. So I’m not going to take it away, because my power is magnified in your weakness” (2 Cor. 10:7-10).

And Paul was okay with that. In fact he wholeheartedly agreed that it was best for him and for the progress of the gospel that he continue to have this affliction.

That’s the best thing about prayer. Prayer is not *primarily* about getting something I want. When I am persistent in my praying something happens to my wants. My wants change. *My* wants become *His* wants. And so prayer is not primarily about getting *something* it’s about getting *God*. God’s heart becomes my heart, His mind my mind, His will my will.

Someone wrote these words:

I asked for strength that I might achieve; He made me weak that I might obey. I asked for health that I might do great things; He gave me grace that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy; He did not give them so that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness that I might feel a need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I received very few of the things that I asked for; but I received the things that I had hoped for.

I began this message by quoting a verse in Psalm 34. “*O taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*” (34:8). Just before David blurted out that exclamation, he was describing what God had done in response to his prayers. He said,

*⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.*

*⁵ Those who look to him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.*

*⁶ This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles.*

Because God met him during these times of prayer, and because God responded to these prayers, David tasted God’s goodness firsthand. And it was so satisfying, so exhilarating that he beckoned all of us to taste it ourselves.

God’s love is infinite and unconditional. God’s goodness is absolute. And God’s love and goodness compel him to want to be generous with his loved ones. Persistent prayer is the way we tap into God’s generosity, and get to taste and see, for ourselves, just how good He really is.

Tasting God's Goodness **Matthew 7:7-11**

Main Idea: We experience God's incredible goodness when we pray persistently

The Commands to pray persistently (7)
The emphatic nature of these verbs

The tense of these verbs

The Rewards of persistent prayer (8)
The certainty of God's response

The implications of not asking...

The Reasons persistent prayer works (9-11)
The cruelty of Greek "gods"

The nature of fatherhood
Even "evil" earthly fathers are good to their children

Most certainly a "good" heavenly Father is good to his children

The Questions that arise from this passage
Why is *persistence* necessary?

What about prayers that are not answered?

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

“Tasting God’s Goodness” Matthew 7:7-11

The tense of the verbs in verses 7-8 indicate continuous action. “Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking...” Why is persistence in prayer necessary?

Have you had personal experience where you have seen why persistent prayer was necessary?

In verse 8 Jesus communicates a sense of certainty regarding God’s response to our persistent prayers. “Keep on asking and it **will** be given you...” Have you experienced the truth of this promise?

Is there evidence in Scripture to indicate that God doesn’t always answer our prayers?

How do you reconcile Jesus’ words in verse 8 with “unanswered” prayer in your own life?