

MATTHEW 7:7-11

[INTRODUCTION]

- Today is the last week of our kickoff series *Possible: When God Has More*.
 - We've been focusing on this question:
What are you asking God to do in your life this year?
 - We don't have to settle for the same old struggles, sins, and sighs.
 - Instead, we can be a people of hope:
 - In our faith, character, relationships, circumstances, and more...
 - Things can be different—things can be better.
 - WHY?
 - Not because we finally get it together.
 - But because: *The **Father** truly loves us. The **Spirit** moves among us. And **Jesus** our Messiah holds forever those he loves.*
- So, how would you answer our question?
What are you asking God to do in your life this year?

[Transition]

- Today, we'll all have the opportunity to write our answer down.
- But before we do that, I want to share some final encouragement—from Jesus.
 - He's preaching the greatest sermon of all time—the Sermon on the Mount.
 - As he talks about prayer, he teaches us what to do with the hopes we've been considering.
 - We can sum it up in three words: Ask. Trust. Come.
- First: **Ask**.

1. ASK—JESUS INVITES US TO PRAY

[State]

- **V7: Ask**, and it will be given to you; **seek**, and you will find; **knock**, and it will be opened to you.
- He repeats these words in **V8: For everyone who asks** receives, and the one who **seeks** finds, and to the one who **knocks** it will be opened.
- Don't you love the **progression**?¹
 - Imagine a wee boy with his mother:
 - If she's in the room, he can **ask**. She's ready and able to help.
 - If she's not in the room, he can **seek**. She's just down the hall.
 - And if she's behind a closed door, he can **knock**. She's never off-limits to the child she loves.
 - Whatever the circumstances—whether God feels near or far away—we're invited to ask!

[Illustrate]: Don't miss the fact that this invitation comes from Jesus himself.

- Imagine I say to you after the service, "Good to see you! Heads up: I've invited myself and some friends to your house for lunch today."
 - That would be awkward, wouldn't it? WHY?
 - Because I don't have the authority to do that!
- In the same way, I don't have the authority to invite you to pray—but Jesus does.
 - He has all **authority** in heaven and on earth...
 - And he is the one who has bought us **access** to God.
 - His life, death, and resurrection have brought us near.
 - That's why we pray "In Jesus's Name."

[Apply]: And the one in whose name we pray is the one who invites us to pray!

- He says: Ask!
- So you bet we can ask.

[Transition]: But Jesus doesn't just invite us to **Ask**. He also encourages us to **Trust**.

2. TRUST—GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

[State]

- Look at what he says:
 - **V7:** Ask, and it will be **given** to you; seek, and you will **find**; knock, and it will be **opened** to you.
 - Again, he doubles down in **V8: receives... finds... opened.**
 - Then **VV9-11:** 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!
- I love this section because it does two things at the same time.
 - **First, it makes clear that God answers prayer.** When we pray, things happen that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't prayed—in our faith, character, relationships, and circumstances.
 - **Second, it reminds us that we can trust him.**
 - Our hope is not in prayer itself—our hope is in the Lord our God.
 - He is a loving Father—he knows what is good, he wants what is good, and he gives good things to his children.

And it's this very goodness that enables us to trust even when our prayers aren't answered exactly like we'd hoped.

[Illustrate]

- I've been wanting to touch on this in this series—How do we make sense of those times we ask but don't get the answer we expected?
- Consider these categories:²

1. Sometimes God says NO—but only because he's good.

- ***Maybe we've asked for something we shouldn't ask for.***
 - James and John asked for the best seats in heaven. Another time, they wanted Jesus to destroy a village.
 - If the disciples can make self-serving, shortsighted, immature requests—I'm sure I can too.
- ***Or maybe there's nothing obviously wrong with our request—but God has a better plan for us.***
 - Sometimes we get the joy of seeing why he said no: You prayed for a relationship to last—it didn't, but now you're married to someone else.
 - Sometimes, of course, we don't get that joy.
 - But in either case, we can trust him.
 - God is not a genie in a bottle—rub the lamp and get whatever you want.
 - Instead, he's a Father who loves us—he cares about us more than we care about ourselves!

So sometimes he says NO—but only because he's good. We can trust him.

2. Sometimes God says WAIT—but only because he's good.

- We live in an instant society, where faster always seems better.
 - Ever since we were children, we've hated the words NOT YET.
 - And when it comes to prayer—there's an impatient child in all of us!
- But like any wise parent, God always has reasons for making us wait:
 - ***Sometimes he's working on US:***
 - Instant gratification breeds shallow character.
 - Trust, endurance, patience, resilience—we want these things, but they can only be formed in time.
 - ***Other times he's working on the very SITUATION we're praying about.***
 - Take the cake out too early and you're left with a gooey slop.
 - In the same way:
 - Your healing might take time.
 - Your wayward kid might need time.
 - Or it might be more logistical—the mentor you need hasn't retired and moved to Knoxville yet.
 - God's not slow, he's just not willing to give you something half-baked.

So sometimes he says WAIT—but only because he's good. We can trust him.

3. Sometimes we DON'T KNOW what God's doing—because he's God.

- There is a mystery to prayer:
 - Asked for your husband to **stop drinking**—but he came home drunk again last night.
 - Asked for your **depression** to lift—but you seem to be sinking even deeper.
 - Asked for a loved one to **come to faith**—but there's no hint of progress.
- These are hard things—our prayers seem good and right, and we can't understand why God hasn't answered them.

- In those moments, it's helped me to remember two things:
 - **Remember that he is God.**
 - **Isa 55:9:** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
 - There's freedom in submission.
 - I might not understand, but God knows what he's doing.
 - And when the results are in, his character will be intact.
 - **Remember the gospel.**
 - **Rom 8:32:** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - The cross assures us he is for us—even when we don't understand what he's doing.
 - Nothing can separate us from his love.
 - And when the results are in, it won't just be his character that's intact—we will be too.

***Sometimes we DON'T KNOW what God's doing—because he's God.
But because we know what he's done in Jesus—we can trust him with this too.***

[Apply]: So hold these two truths together:

- **God answers prayer.** When we pray things happen that wouldn't have happened if we hadn't prayed.
- **And whatever his answer—yes, no, wait, or when we simply don't know—we can trust him.** Our Father loves us and knows how to love us well.

[Transition]

- Jesus invites us to **Ask**, and he gives us every reason to **Trust**.
- Now there's only one thing left to do: **Come**.

3. COME—BRING YOUR REQUESTS TO HIM

[State]

- Do you see the final encouragement Jesus gives us in **v.8**?
 - Who does he invite to ask? Who does he promise he'll answer? Who should come?
 - Maybe you fear prayer is for other people—better people, holier people, people who have their faith together.
 - Maybe you've never prayed before, maybe your life is a disaster, maybe you feel unworthy of being heard.
 - It's okay to feel that way—but Jesus says the gift of prayer is yours.
- Look at what he says in **V8: For everyone who asks receives.**
 - He doesn't say everyone who is worthy—he says everyone who asks.
 - You don't have to make yourself worthy—you just have to come.

[Illustrate]

- This is how the gospel works:
 - We're not accepted because we're worthy—but because Jesus is worthy.
 - Through him we come to the Father.
- So don't let anything keep you from God:
 - Not your failures, doubts, or fears...
 - Let them drive you to him—Come.

[Apply]

- So, what are you asking God to do in your life this year?
 - In your **faith**—Maybe you've been going through the motions, feeling guilty for not being closer to God, and you're longing for a fresh start.
 - In your **character**—an old sin you want to move on from, an old wound you want to be healed.
 - In your **relationships**—a marriage that needs new life, a friendship you want to begin, a child or parent you need God's help to forgive.
 - In your **circumstances**—a job, a diagnosis, a decision you need to make.
- Whatever it is—Bring it to your Father.
Ask him. Trust him. Come to him.

[Transition]: And that brings us to the Hope Jar.

- This week, our staff put their hopes into words.
- And we'd like to invite you to join us—three steps:

[THE CLOSE]

[Hope Jar]

1. Write Your Hope Down.

- There are **pens** in your pews, and **paper** at the end of each row—if you're sitting there, please pass it down.
- **Write down** your hope: What are you asking God to do in your life this year?
- If you have **kids** with you, help them write theirs too.
- We'll take a few minutes in silence, then the band will lead us in worship—**take your time** and join in the singing whenever you're ready.

2. Bring Your Hope to Jesus.

- After the service, fold or roll up your slip of paper.
- On your way out, there'll be people at the doors to collect it.
 - We won't open or read any of them—we'll place them directly into this jar.
 - If you'd prefer—you're welcome to come and place it in the jar yourself.

3. Let's see what God will do.

- Over the course of the year we'll pray over these hopes together.
- At the end of the year, I'm sure we'll have some stories to tell.

[Three Ways to Come]

- If you wouldn't describe yourself as a Christian yet, maybe you take this moment to become one—ask him to forgive you, trust him to save you, come to him now. That's one prayer God always, always answers yes.
- If you're not even sure if you believe in God, maybe you ask him to reveal himself to you if he's there. That's another prayer he loves to answer.
- If you do believe, write down what you're asking him to do in your life this year.

Call to me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things.

Do you want to be healed?

Ask, and it will be given to you.

What do you want God to do in your life this year?

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*
- John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew*.
- H. B. Charles, Jr., *God's Unblocked Number*.
- Collin Huber, *Do You Want to Be Healed?*
- Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*.
- Tim Keller, *The Pool*.
- Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*.
- Logos Bible Software.
- John L. Mackay, *Jeremiah Volume 2 (Chapters 21-52)*.
- Matthew H. Patton, *Jeremiah*.
- Jonathan Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*.
- John Piper, *Ask Your Father in Heaven*.
- Trevin Wax, *Do You Want to Be Healed?*

Endnotes

¹ I owe this insight to John Piper, *Ask Your Father in Heaven*, accessed [here](#) 12/9/21.

² I owe this section to Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray*, chapter 8.