

Three Steps to Answered Prayer

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by Vesta Mangun

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened”(Matthew 7:7-8).

What makes a prayer really a prayer? The saying of it? Or the hearing of it? Or is it the answering of it? Most Christians pray superficial and shallow prayers. We pray like children in a sandbox throwing up sand toward the sky.

Prayer is not a mystical gift which binds the hands of God to do as we wish. Prayer is the communication between a father and his child. Jesus Himself prayed constantly as an illustration to us, and He taught on prayer to help us understand and answer our questions. We know these verses well; most of us can quote them. But, in our familiarity, we may overlook important concepts. I believe, in these verses, Jesus Christ revealed three elements to real prayer. Each of these elements must be active for the prayer to reach fruition.

The Principle of Asking

“Ask, and it shall be given you...”

In verses 9 and 10 of Matthew 7, we see the child’s humble asking. He asks his father for bread and fish. The child knows his father can provide and has confidence that he will do so. Jeremiah 33:3 says, *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”* Psalm 2:8 says, *“Ask of me, and I will give thee...”* And in Psalm 145:18 we read, *“The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.”*

Prayer is not shopping for an answer; prayer is asking expectantly for an answer. Jesus taught us to ask, *“Give us this day our daily bread...”* The blind man called to Jesus by the way, *“Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”* When Jesus asked him his need, he said, *“Lord, that I might receive my sight...”* Peter, when sinking beneath the waves, said *“Lord, save me.”*

One would think that this principle would be a simple one. But, *“Ye have not, because ye ask not”* (James 4:2). How many times have you heard someone say, “Why didn’t you just say so?” Sometimes it is hard to get to the point. The passenger who hails a cab must tell the driver where he wants to go. The lady who walks in the grocery store has a list. The Christian who would communicate with his Heavenly Father must ASK! Our prayers must not be like political speeches, with flowery language but saying nothing.

The first great principle of prayer is to ask.

The Principle of Abiding

“ ... Seek, and ye shall find...”

The second great principle of answered prayer is to seek. This word, “zete”, means *to seek in order to find out by thinking, meditating, and reasoning; to inquire into*. God continually calls on His people to seek Him in His fullness.

“But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). *“When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek”* (Psalm 27:8). *“Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, that seek him with the whole heart”* (Psalm 119:2). *“I love them that love me; And those that seek me diligently shall find me”* (Proverbs 8:17). *“Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near”* (Isaiah 55:6). *“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:13). *“ ... That he is a rewarder of them that seek after him”* (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus expounded on this condition of continual seeking in the Gospel of John. He called it “abiding.” John 15:4-7 says, *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”*

To abide in the Vine (in Christ) is a threefold proposition. We abide in Him in relationship to place, time and condition. We abide with Him wherever He is, all the time, and in whatever condition we find ourselves. This is the fullness of the Christian life! This is the ultimate of Christian living! This is the place where we find answers to our prayers! There is a living connection between the vine and the branch. The life and fruitfulness comes from the vine to the branches. Jesus says, *“Without me ye can do nothing.”* We can be successful only by Jesus Christ dwelling and abiding in us. We can be pleasing to Him only by abiding. Notice especially verse 7, *“If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”* Contrast this verse with James 4:3, *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”* One person called this the “absence of holy desire” – and surely it is. There is no “asking amiss” when we abide in Him, for His desires and blessings flow from the vine to the branches. We are one in our prayers!

The Principle of Anticipating

“ ... Knock, and it shall be opened unto you...”

Our last principle deals with “knocking.” It means to literally knock on a door. It is the same word, *krouo*, used in Revelation 3:20 when Jesus says, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock...”* To knock on a door is to anticipate an answer. We knock because we seek entry. We have a desire to have dealings with someone inside. There is a sense of expectation, or anticipating, in knocking. Simply, there is faith. Jesus commanded us to *have faith in God*. He constantly chided the disciples, *How is it that you have no faith?*

1 John 5:14-15, *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”* John 14:13-14, *“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”* Mark 11:24, *“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”*

Our heart’s reply to those verses is “if only it were that easy!” But it is easy – if we have faith! Jesus said, *“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”* But remember the order of the principles: ask, abide, and anticipate. Are you abiding in Him? Is your request pleasing unto Him? Are you sure you are asking “according to His will”? If so, then *have faith in God!*

The devil has bound both our left hand and right hand in prayer. If we pray for the salvation for a loved one or that God might revive our church, he tells us that God is not willing, and so we lack faith in Him. If we do not abide in Christ, we ask amiss for things that are not pleasing to Him. Then we seem to have faith, and are disappointed when we do not receive the object of our lust. We have obscured the concept of Biblical prayer. James warns us in James 1:5-7, *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”*

That’s why Satan will do everything he can to keep People of the Name from praying!

No wonder prayer binds Satan and shackles his bands of hellish demons! Prayer unleashes the mighty power of Heaven! Prayer looses the angelic hosts to do their work on this earth – work of deliverance and salvation!

Prayer bombs the spiritual targets of Satan, forcing him to retreat in desperation. Prayer changes the destinies of families, cities and nations. Prayer breaks the spell of Satan over individual lives, setting them free! Prayer is the exertion of spiritual authority in the invisible war that is raging! Prayer pleases God and gives Him pleasure because it brings victory to the cause of Jesus Christ! Prayer disrupts and dislodges the powers of darkness in the structures of a city.

A Chain Reaction

Blessed is the praying church for it shall be filled. You will not find that beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount! It is not in the Bible! In fact, you have probably never even read it before, but the principle is true – it works! Congregations that pray together ... grow together!

Collective prayer is a vital function of church life. A pastor of one growing congregation remarked, "When my people pray, they begin to love each other. When my people pray, they begin to work together. When my people pray, souls are saved and the church grows."

When God's people gather specifically to pray, a lot more happens than just "the answer." There is a chain reaction of growth and blessing!

The individual is blessed in his personal walk with the Lord, and by the strengthening that comes from intercession.

The family is blessed by the forum that calls its members to specific prayer, and by the platform on which God demonstrates the promises of His Word.

The pastor is blessed by the rallying spirit produced by the prayer-consciousness of his flock, and by the resulting support for the local work of God.

Church ministries are blessed ... as workers are welded together in common goals and purpose.

The community is blessed ... because it senses the church is reaching out to it as members become more need-conscious.

And the Lord is blessed ... as His people take up His directive, "My house shall be called a house of prayer!"