

MBC - 4/22/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"Knockin' on Heaven's Door"
Ephesians 6:18

Turn with me to Ephesians 6. Last Lord's Day we looked at the command in v.18 to pray at all times in the Spirit. The take away from that message is that you can come as you are to your Father. You can pray for everything, anytime, anywhere when you come through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. He wants you to come! Martin Luther said that "*Prayer is not overcoming His reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.*"

This morning, we're just going to take the next two phrases in v.18—

- Ephesians 6:18 ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance.

(pray)

Intro: Why prayer is at the heart of your relationship with God.

If you are a Christian, the best way to describe your relationship with God is simply this: He is your heavenly Father, and you are His child! "*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*" 1 John 3:1

And at the very heart of your relationship with your Father is *prayer*. And this is why: *because our entire relationship with God revolves around our needs and His ability and willingness to meet our needs.*

Now you need to let that sink in: Your relationship with your heavenly Father is a *need-based* relationship - and we're the ones with the needs - right? This is not a relationship between equals! No, we need Him, and He meets our needs. Spiritually, we're dead and He gives us life; we are sinful and He gives us forgiveness; we're weak, and He gives us the Spirit to help our weakness. We need Him for food, health, hope and happiness.

And don't you go to God constantly with your needs? You do it instinctively. And I think even so-called unbelievers do the same thing: When the engine blew on Southwest flight 1380 this week, Christians were crying out to God, but I'll just bet that unbelievers and atheists were doing the same thing. They weren't screaming, "Help me impersonal chance!" And they weren't crying out to Buddha or pulling out their copy of Dianetics. As God's creatures, we all know that we need Him.

- But for God's children, this is all by His sovereign design to draw us to Him as little children, to *ask* Him, and *trust* Him as our Father to meet our needs. And as our Father, He does that, and He's glorified by showing off His sufficiency.

I.e., God intentionally brings needs, weaknesses, trials, pain, and suffering into our lives for the sake of our relationship with Him. But ultimately, it's for His glory, because *we glorify His sufficiency* when we come to Him as His needy children, trusting our Father who can do anything!

- John Piper said this: "A cry for help from the heart of a childlike believer is sweet praise in the ears of God. Nothing exalts Him more than the collapse of self-reliance which issues in passionate prayer for help."

It glorifies God to cry out to Him, “Father, I’m empty and only You can fill me. I’m hungry and only You can feed me.” This was exactly the response God wanted from the children of Israel in their trials. Listen to what Moses said in—

- Deuteronomy 8:3 ³And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, *that He might make you know* that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Prayer is at the heart of this need-based relationship we have with God because it increases our love and trust in Him, and it glorifies Him as our all-sufficient Father. No wonder He practically begs us to pray to Him. And what we’re going to see this morning is that God is glorified in our asking, in His answering - and He is glorified when we *keep on* asking.

I. God is glorified when we ask.

- Ephesians 6:18 ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, *with all prayer and supplication*.

Supplication simply means asking God for what we need. Turn with me to a passage we read last Sunday—

- Matthew 7:7-11 ⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹If 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!

Does God *want* His children to pray to Him? And does He want us to know that He desires to answer our prayers? *Could He be anymore clear?*

- I remember years ago when I first began teaching at a college age Bible Study. One of my friends did a message on prayer. He said this: “Prayer is not about asking for things from God. God doesn’t change things when we pray—He changes us—that’s what prayer is about.”
- The next week was my turn to teach and I said, “Prayer is *mostly* asking God for stuff. The New Testament teaches us to call God “Father, and then ask Him for stuff.” And I still believe that.

It’s not unspiritual for God’s children to ask their Father for what they need. I pulled a book out of my library awhile back, on prayer, by an evangelical pastor, endorsed by John MacArthur and Al Mohler. The author said: “It’s all too common to go to prayer and immediately begin by demanding, “gimme, gimme, gimme!” Prayer is a time for worshiping God, not being a leech! Prov.30:15)

That’s messed up. How in the world could this guy miss what Jesus says so clearly in this passage? Ask. Seek. Knock! We have needs, God meets needs - that’s why we pray! Didn’t James tell us that we err when we *don’t* ask? “*You have not, because you - what? - ask not!*”

I would go so far as to say that your prayer life is unhealthy if it is not mostly asking—

- Remember the prayer of that self-righteous Pharisee in the Temple? It was all patting himself on his own back. He asked for *nothing*, because he was self-righteous and self-sufficient and didn't really think he needed anything from God. But that humble tax-collector's prayer was just one simple request - "O God, be merciful to me!"
- Paul asked God for stuff. Jesus asked His Father for stuff, and He taught us to ask our Father for stuff: the Lord's prayer is *all* asking! Six petitions to God.
- When Peter was walking on the water and began to sink, he prayed the shortest prayer in the Bible - 3 words: "*Lord, save me!*" That was *supplication* - asking. And Jesus answered, didn't He. Can you imagine if Peter had said to himself, "Now I have to go through the prayer acrostic I learned in Sunday School: ACTS - Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. . . blub, blub blub. . ." He would have been at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee!

I don't want you to feel that you are being self-centered when you cry out to God with your needs and requests. **God is glorified in your asking, and glorified in His giving.** Look with me at—

- John 14:13 ¹³Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

What is Jesus saying? "Ask! Pray! Ask Me for things, and I will do it" - did you notice that, Jesus Himself will do it. Huh, He must still be alive if He is still doing stuff. And what is the purpose? That the Father is glorified in His Son. The goal of all things is the glory and display of the character of God; that is the end, and one of the means to this end is our asking, and Jesus' answering - that brings the Father glory—

- God has focused all the riches of His glory in His Son, and praying in Jesus' name is like writing a check on Christ's account in the Bank of Heaven. God loves to cash those checks and show off His riches in His Son! And let me tell you, He never has insufficient funds.

So prayer is asking your Father for stuff you need: for the Gospel to bear fruit - for the church to be built up in the Philippines when Erroll and I go there next month - and doing it in Jesus' name, so that God is glorified in Him when He answers!" And Jesus said this again, but He added something really interesting—

- John 15:7-8 ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

Oh, now notice this: the implication here is that you are asking the Father to help you be *fruitful* - what did Jesus mean by fruitful? He means fruitful for the Gospel: fruitful when you serve others, fruitful when you share the Gospel, fruitful in however you minister. And then when you bear fruit, it brings God glory - and shows off that you really are one of His new creations! He says it again—

- John 15:16 ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

I hope you are getting this: one of the reasons we pray and ask of our Father, is so that He can answer and display His glory! Ask God, boldly, in prayer, so that He can answer and display His glory!

Prayer glorifies God because it shows that we trust Him as our Father. We're not going anywhere else to fulfill our needs and our desires; we're not slouchin' around to see what the world has to offer. We are going to our Father for living Bread and living Water - and God is glorified in our *trusting* in His all-sufficiency, and He is glorified when He meets our needs out of His all-sufficiency.

John Piper put this in a way that has changed my life and the lives of probably millions of other Christians. He said, "*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.*"

He illustrates it this way—

- “The glory of bread is that it satisfies. The glory of living water is that it quenches thirst. We do not honor the refreshing, self-replenishing, pure water of a mountain spring by lugging buckets of water up the path to make our contributions from the ponds below. We honor the spring by feeling thirsty, and getting down on our knees, and drinking with joy. Then we say, “Ahhhh!” (that’s worship!); and we go on our journey in the strength of the fountain (that’s service). The mountain spring is glorified most when we are most satisfied with its water.” (*Loving God for Who He Is: A Pastor’s Perspective*, blog, Jan1, 1995)

God loves to be trusted by His children! You do that by coming to Him with your requests.

So are you asking your Father? God is glorified in our asking, He is glorified in His answering, and—

II. God is glorified when we keep on asking.

- Ephesians 6:18 ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance.

Notice he says “**keep alert.**” *Watch* and pray. Don’t let prayer slip into an empty habit. That happens so easily when you are trying to pray all the time about everything. If you don’t stay alert, with your mind engaged, prayer can drift off into just talking to yourself. Right? It’s hard to stay alert - it takes effort to keep praying. Haven’t you fallen asleep while praying? It happened to Peter, James, and John when Jesus took them up to the Mt.of Transfiguration. It happened when He took them to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him before the cross. I’m sure Jesus was just as exhausted as they were, but He kept praying, until He sweat blood. And wasn’t it these prayers that carried Him all the way through His crucifixion?

Thank you Jesus, that You stayed alert and kept praying! If He hadn’t, we wouldn’t have a Savior.

And we are to keep alert and keep on praying. Jesus wanted us to get this. In Lk.11, it says that He was teaching His disciples how to pray, and this is what He taught them:

- Luke 11:5-9 ⁵And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’

In that day hospitality was a huge deal. You would do almost anything to take care of your guests, including waking up your neighbor to give you some bread—

- ⁷and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything?’ [This is a lousy neighbor to refuse to help out with some bread.]
- ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence (that means *audacity* - the British would say, “cheeky”) he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Is Jesus saying that God is bugged when we pray to Him, but we can wear Him down if we just keep asking? NO! He is making a dramatic contrast: if even a lousy neighbor will give in to someone pounding on his door, how much more will your loving heavenly Father answer the requests of His *children* when they continue to ask, seek, and knock! He told another—

- Luke 18:1-7 ¹And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ²He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”

Again, Jesus is making a contrast: God is *not like* that judge. He is your *Father*, how much more will He hear and answer your requests: *so you ought always to pray and not lose heart*.

Don’t give up. Don’t do it with mindless repetitions - like praying the rosary - but you keep praying because you know that you have a Father who invites you to come, and promises to hear and answer. Ps.116—

Why we stop praying.

So if God promises to answer our prayers, then why is it so hard for us to persevere in prayer? It shouldn’t be any effort at all.

- Imagine if you went out to some remote stream in the gold country to pan for gold. And lo and behold, the very first time you put in your pan and swirl it around, there is gold in that pan! So you put it in again, and there’s even more. So you do it again, and again - gold, every time. Let me ask you, “Would you stop? Take a break? Maybe come back in a week or two?” No! You wouldn’t stop to eat, sleep, or even go to the bathroom as long as the gold kept coming! It would take 10 men to tear you away from that spot.

But we stop praying. The disciples stopped praying when the demon wouldn’t come out of that little boy. And you and I have prayed for things that are more precious than gold: the souls of people we love and care about - but we grow weary, even in those prayers. We don’t persevere in prayer the way Jesus tells us too. Why not? You know why not: because God doesn’t seem to answer your prayers.

- You ask, and seek, and knock, and many times, you don’t get what you ask for, or you might get the opposite of what you ask for. Or you’ve prayed for years for God to do

something that is so important to you - and still, nothing. *So why keep praying when God doesn't seem to answer?*

You need to be able to answer this question in your own heart, or you won't persevere in prayer. You will lose heart. And here is the answer: God *does* answer the prayers of His children when they come to Him as their Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. I believe He promises to answer - but His answer might not be what we expect.

A. Sometimes His answer is 'no.'

Oftentimes, His answer is no, right?

- When my kids were little they would ask for stuff all the time, many times I would say no. And then they would say, "Dad, I need an answer," and I would say, "I gave you the answer, it is 'no.'"

Have you ever thought about how often Jesus told His disciples no?

"Lord, can we make reservations for the best seats in the kingdom? No."

"Lord, can we call fire down from heaven to destroy this city? No."

"Lord, can You tell us when You are going to return? No."

And often, that's our heavenly Father's answer. And if that is His answer, it's the very *best* answer!

- I can think of two times recently that I prayed very specifically. And God answered very specifically. In both cases, *no!* But His "no" was so clear and unmistakable and in response to my requests, that I said, "*Thank You, Lord, for hearing and answering my prayers!*"

If God is a loving Father to sinful, misguided children, He has to say 'no,' often. Back to Matt. 7—

- ⁹Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹If 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!

Look at what He is saying: even the best human father is still "evil," sinful, way short of the kind of Father that God is to His children. But even imperfect earthly fathers generally give their children what is good. So how very much more your Father who is in heaven will *only* give what is good in answer to our prayers - *Only What is Good!*

*Even if we ask for something dumb? Gee, we would never do that, would we? What if we ask for a stone, or a serpent? We can trust Him, that He won't give it. Isn't that a comfort? James said that sometimes God's answer is no, because we have asked amiss - with wrong motives, or for something that would harm us. Aren't you glad that He says no when you do that?

- You've heard the saying, "The gods punish us by answering our prayers?" Well not our God! Your heavenly Father will never give you what you asked for if it's not His will. Doesn't that free you up to ask your Father freely?

I often think that if God always agreed with me, I would have grounds for seriously questioning His wisdom! I *count on* God to say no when I ask for something that isn't best for me. And I do that all the time. Didn't Paul say in Romans 8:26, "*we don't know how to pray as we should?*"

Oh, we need to love and thank our Father for the 'no' answers He gives - every bit as much as for the 'yes' answers, right?

- But isn't it true: if we opened up the service right now and I said, "Let's share some answers to prayer," they would all be "yes" answers--right? I don't think I've ever heard someone stand up and say, "Praise the Lord, He didn't give me what I asked for!"

But we should! When He answers with a 'no' it's just as loving as when He answers with a 'yes.' What His loves denies us should be just as sweet as what His love gives us. No is one way God *answers* our prayers. And—

B. Sometimes His answer is 'not yet.'

If you are a parent, you say "No" a lot. But ranking a close second is "Not yet."

"Are we almost there?" Not yet.

"Is dinner ready?" Not yet.

"Can I open my present now?" Not yet.

"Mom, I'm 9 years old, can't I wear nylons and makeup to school?" Not yet.

Kids hate those words--but aren't we all kids to God? And don't we all say, "But God, I want it now!" And God, as a good Father says, "The answer is yes, but not yet; you need to wait." Why would God answer with "not yet?"

1.) Sometimes He wants to grow our faith.

If you got an immediate yes answer to everything you prayed for, your faith would still be in diapers. "Faith is the assurance of things *hoped* for, the evidence of things *not seen*" (Heb. 11:1), so when you keep believing God even when you can't see the answer, your faith grows. Think how long Abe and Sarah had to wait to see the answer to what God promised them:

- Romans 4:19-21 ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Never forget this spiritual principle: *What God wants to do in your life while you are waiting is at least as important as what you are waiting for.* You single people, especially, remember this.

2.) Sometimes He wants to cut off all earthly hope, so that all the glory goes to Him.

That's why He made Abe and Sarah wait until childbirth was a biological impossibility. And how many have you said, when the answer finally came: "This had to be God - no other explanation."

3.) And that makes the answer that much sweeter when it comes!

- I can think of things that I prayed for, for years--in one case almost 20 years, before God gave His answer--but it was just right, at just the right time.

And when we keep praying and waiting, we are more humble and thankful, and more eager to give God all the glory - so isn't it worth the wait? Let me give you a prayer request that will change your life and your walk with God: "*Heavenly Father, prepare me to accept whatever answer You give, with joy and trust.*" And then believe that all the while He makes you wait, He is answering this prayer!

4.) Sometimes, God simply seeks the communion that comes when we keep coming back in prayer.

- Thomas Watson, the Puritan pastor said that God might delay His answers because He loves to hear the voice of prayer. "You let the musician play a great while before you throw him down money, because you love to hear this music."

And that brings us back to the whole purpose of prayer, which is that we might seek God and find Him faithful and all-sufficient to meet our needs. God wants us to draw to Him, deeply, continually. Would you do that if He answered every prayer, immediately? No. He makes you dig deeper to find water. And it's worth the effort and the time--

- Jer. 29:12-14 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord,

C. Sometimes His answer is "yes."

Sometimes God says 'no,' sometimes He says, 'go slow,' and sometimes He say, 'let's go!' The answer is yes. And it is so clear, and detailed, that it just about takes your breath away! God wants us to pray specifically so that He can answer specifically and show off what an awesome Father He is.

So never put limits on what you ask an unlimited God to do. Remember, He delights to show off the extravagance of the riches of His grace in His Son, and He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." As William Carey said, "Ask great things of God and expect great things from God!"

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If you have stopped praying, you've stopped persevering - why? Do you doubt His love, or His wisdom, or His power? He wants you to ask! He wants you to seek! He wants you to knock! And it's all for the sake of His relationship with you, and to display His glory.

Elizabeth Elliot shared this true story several years ago, about God answering the prayers of one of His children, with a 'yes.'

Brenda Foltz of Princeton, Minnesota went rock-climbing for the first time. She wrote about what happened to her: "I started up the rock as fast as I could, determined to

“set my face like a flint” toward the peak. After a time, I came to a difficult ledge, and my breathless scrambling came to an abrupt halt. Suddenly, the rope was pulled too taut and hit me square in the eye. “Oh NO!” I thought wildly, “my contact lens is GONE!” From my precarious perch I looked everywhere on the rope and sharp granite rock for a tiny, transparent lens, which could easily be mistaken for a water droplet.

“Lord Jesus, help me find it!” I prayed and pleaded, knowing the hopelessness of my search with such limited mobility. I looked as long as I could maintain my hold, praying with a sinking heart. Finally I resumed my climb with one last glimmer of hope— maybe the contact was still in my eye, crumpled in the corner or up under my eyelid. When I reached the top, I had a friend check to see if she could find it in my eye. It wasn’t there. Every hope was gone. I was *disappointed*, and anxious about getting a new contact so far away from home. As we sat and rested, surveying the world from such a gloriously high perspective, the fragment of a verse popped into my head “*The eyes of God go to and fro through the whole earth.*”

“God knows EXACTLY WHERE MY CONTACT IS this moment from His high vantage point,” the amazing thought struck me. But I’LL never see it again, I concluded. So, still glum, I headed down the path to the bottom where the others were preparing to climb. About half an hour later another girl set out where I had also begun my climb. She had *no inkling* of the missing contact. But there, at the steep bottom of the rock face, she let out an excited cry: “Hey you guys—did anyone lose a contact?” I rushed over as she continued yelling, “There’s an ANT carrying a contact down the mountain!” Sure enough. Special delivery! I bent down, retrieved my contact from the hardworking ant, doused it with water and put it back in my eye, rejoicing. I was in awe, as if my Father had just given me, though so undeserving, a big hug, and said, “*My precious daughter, I care about every detail of your life.*”

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Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision, where I live in the depths but see Thee in the heights; hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold Thy glory. Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision. Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells, and the deeper the wells the brighter Thy stars shine; let me find Thy light in my darkness, Thy life in my death, Thy joy in my sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy riches in my poverty, Thy glory in my valley.