

Sunday, October 18, 2009

**Matthew 7.7-12
Ask, Seek, Knock; Three Spiritual Disciplines
SWCOB 10.17.09**

A businessman was late for an important meeting,
And couldn't find a parking space.

As he frantically circled the block,
The man got so desperate that he decided to pray.

Looking up toward heaven, he said,
"Lord, have pity on me.
If you find me a parking space,
I'll go to church every Sunday for the rest of my life . . .

And not only that, I'll give up drinking."

Miraculously, a parking space appeared.

The businessman looked up to heaven and said,
"Never mind, I found one."

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We pray the Lord's Prayer almost every Sunday,
And we recite together,
"Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth and it is in heaven."

But how many of us really mean it?

Let's face it,
Asking for God's will is a scary thing.

There's no telling what God might have you do,
He might send you to Iowa to pastor a church!

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As believers in Jesus,
Our ultimate prayer, our ultimate goal,
Our ultimate purpose in life,
Is to serve Him,

And the first step in this process is simply to ask;
Ask God for direction and guidance.

However, in asking, let us not ask in a meek way,
As if to say this is the last thing on earth we want to do,

But pray boldly and confidently for His will.
Do not limit the prayer to only what we feel capable of.

Pray big,
For we do not know the limits of God's will for our lives.

Phillip Brooks says,

“Pray the largest prayers.

You cannot think a prayer so large,
That God, in answering it,
Will not wish you had made it larger.

Pray not for crutches,
Pray for wings.”

In our prayers, we should not limit God's will,
By our own feelings of inadequacy.

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Fred Craddock tells the story of a young pastor,
Who goes to the hospital to visit an old woman.

She lay in the hospital bed very close to death.

After a short visit the pastor stands up to go,
The woman says, “Please pray for me.”

The young pastor says, “How can I pray for you?”

And she answers, “I want to pray for complete health.”

The young pastor gasps at this request,
Thinking her time had come, but goes on.

“Lord, we pray for your sustaining presence with this sick sister.

And if it be Thy will,
We pray that she'd be restored to health.

But if it's not Thy will,
We pray that she will adjust to her circumstances.”

Suddenly before he completes the prayer,
The old woman opens her eyes and sits up.

She throws her feet over the side of the bed.
She stands up.
She says, "I think I'm healed."

The last the young pastor sees of her,
Is the woman skipping down the hall past the nurses' station.

The pastor leaves and goes out to his car,
And looks up towards heaven and says,
"Please God, don't do that to me again."

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The greatest things ever done for God,
Has been done by people who didn't think they could do it.

Andrew Murray says,

"Beware in your prayer, above everything, of limiting God,
Not only by unbelief,
But by fancying that you know,
What He can or can't do through you."

~~

In this passage, Jesus tells to ask, to seek, to knock.

It is one thing to ask for God's will in our life,
It is altogether another thing to seek it.

Most of us stop at asking,
And really, most of us pray the Lord's Prayer,
And never really think about the words,
"Thy will be done."

We pray for God's will,
And then we close our eyes and ears,
To what God may be speaking or showing us.

Seek and ye shall find.

Seeking is a part of the task of discovering God's will.

It is like entering a room full of closed doors,
Seeking to discover what lay beyond the closed doors.

And so many of us ask, seek, or knock,
In a timid fashion.

We stand in the room full of closed doors,
Afraid to ask,

Afraid to seek,
Afraid to knock.

And then turn around and exit through the door we entered.

The great preacher, C. H. Spurgeon writes,

“Prayer pulls the rope below,
And the great bell rings above,
In the ears of God.

Some scarcely stir the bell,
For they pray so languidly.

Others give an occasional pluck at the rope.

But he who wins with heaven,
Is the one who grasps the rope,
Boldly and continuously,
With all his might!”

~~

Pull on the rope of heaven’s bells! Pull!

Make it sound loudly,
Make it wake the dead!

Pray, asking for God’s will!
Seek it with all your heart and mind!

Knock on every door that is available to knock on!

Don’t give up!

Pray for God’s will in your life!
Pray for God’s will in the life of this church!

~~

There is a story about Arnold Palmer,
Who once played a series of exhibition matches
In Saudi Arabia.

The king was so impressed,
That he told Palmer,
He wanted to give him a gift of appreciation.

Palmer quietly said that it wasn’t necessary.
But the king insisted.

And so Palmer suggested meekly,
“Well, how about a golf club?”

“That would be a beautiful memento of my visit to your country.”

The next day, delivered to Palmer’s hotel room,
Was the title to a golf club.

Thousands of acres,
Trees, lakes, clubhouses, and so forth.

The moral of the story?
When in the presence of the King,
Don’t ask for small gifts! (Brennan Manning)

~~

I quote from Phillip Brooks again,

“Do not pray for easy lives,
Pray to be stronger people.

Do not pray for tasks equal to your power,
Pray for powers equal to your task!”

~~

Ask, seek, knock,
Three steps in spiritual discernment.

We should not be timid to pray big for South Waterloo.

On our first Board retreat as pastor of Moscow COB,
One of the goals was to increase
Worship attendance in one year by 25%.

It was not accomplished in the first year,
But by the third year,
Worship attendance had increased 30%!

Ask God in a big way for his will on your life,
And the life of this church.

And then seek ways to serve him with all your heart and strength,
And don’t be afraid to knock on the door.

~~

Skye Jethani shares a story about a trip
He took with his father to India.

While walking the streets of New Delhi,
A little boy came up to them.

He was as skinny as a rail,
And naked except for a pair of tattered trousers.

Because of his condition he could only crawl upon his knees.

He made his way toward the two men yelling,
“One rupee, please! One rupee!”

Skye’s father stopped and asked the beggar what he wanted.

“One rupee, sir.” The boy stated, motioning with his hand,
Toward his mouth, expressing the need for food.

Skye’s father asked the beggar,
“How about I give you five rupees?”

The boy suddenly became defiant.

He took his hand away and sneered at them.

He thought the father joking making fun of him,
For five rupees was no small sum.

The boy started crawling away,
When Skye’s father jingled the coins in his pocket.

The boy stopped and looked back.

The father was holding a five rupee coin in his hand,
And approached the boy.

He placed the coin in the beggar’s hand.

The little boy didn’t know what to say.
He just stared at the coin.

Skye and his father started along the street,
When suddenly the little boy started shouting,
“Thank you, bless you.”

He raced after them again,
But this time, not for the money,
But to touch the father’s feet.

Skye finishes his story with these words.

“This I imagine is how God sees us,
As miserable creatures in desperate need of his help.

But rather than asking for what we truly need,
Rather than desiring what he is able and willing to give,
We settle for lesser things” (Skye Jethani).

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We are told by Jesus to pursue the will of God,
Through a prayer-filled life;

Asking, seeking, and knocking at the door of God's will.

How will we ever know the riches,
God has for us,
If we never dare to take a step?

Alexander McClaren in his book,
"Streams in the Desert" writes,
"We may have as much of God as we will.

Christ puts the key of the treasure chamber into our hand.

And bids us to take all we want.

If a man is admitted into the bullion vault of a bank,
And told to help himself,
And comes out with one cent,

Whose fault is it that he is poor?

Whose fault is it that Christian people generally,
Have such scanty portions of the free riches of God?"

~~

John Ortberg tells this story:

"When my friend Kim was a young girl,
Her dad pulled the car off the road,
To help a woman change a flat tire.

While he was under the car,
Another car accidentally swerved off the road,
Hit the car with the flat tire,
And pinned him under the car.

His right thumb was torn off,
Five of his ribs were broken,
And his left lung was pierced and began filling with blood.

His wife, barely, five-feet-tall placed her hands on the bumper
Of the car and prayed,
"In the name of Jesus,"

And lifted the car off his chest,
So he could be dragged out.

Kim's father was in shock,
As he was taken to the hospital.

Doctors prepared him for emergency surgery,
His survival was iffy.

Suddenly, spontaneously,
The man's skin changed from white to pink.

He experienced a miraculous healing.

He did not find out until later,
That this was the precise moment his father-in-law,
Who was a pastor,
Had the congregation start to pray for him.

Sometimes these stories come from not-very-credible sources—
Publications sold in the grocery store checkout,

Magazines that also carry stories about extraterrestrial creatures,
Secretly playing third base for the Boston Red Sox.

In this case the subject, James Loder,
A professor at Princeton Theological Seminary.

His life was not only saved,
It was changed.

Until then he taught at the seminary,
With God only an abstract idea to him.

Now Jesus became a living Presence.

Kim writes that her father's heart,
Grew so tender that he became known,
At Princeton as the "weeping professor."

He began to live from one moment to the next,
In a God-bathed, God-soaked, God-intoxicated world
(John Ortberg)."

~~

Who dares to ask, seek, and knock,
On the door of God's will?

Who would dare to pray boldly for South Waterloo?
To pray big things for this church?

After worship today,
Go and see the differing ways you can serve your church.

Pray for God's will in your life.
Pray for God's will in this church.

Pray for God's Holy Spirit to descend upon us,
And create something really big here.

Surprise us, O God.

As Phillip Brooks said,

“Pray the largest prayers.

Don't think a prayer so large,
That God, in answering it,
Will not wish you had made it larger.

Pray not for crutches for South Waterloo,
Pray for wings.”

Come, Lord Jesus, Come!