

Scripture Reading:

Please go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7:7-11 for our scripture reading today...Matthew 7:7-11...We are in Matthew 7:7-11...And I will ask you to please stand if you are able to do so for the reading of God's Word...

<sup>7</sup>“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.  
<sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.  
<sup>9</sup>Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?  
<sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?  
<sup>11</sup>If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Please be seated...”

Introduce Yourself:

Good morning...It is an honor to be here with you this morning...If you don't know who I am, my parents named me Byron Bradshaw and I am privileged to be the pastor here at Calvary Bible Church...

Before we dive in this morning I like to take a moment and share two thoughts...

The first thought is not so much a thought and rather a thank you...

I'd like to take a moment and say thank you...I want say thank you to all the people that have been so faithful to Calvary for so many years...I want to thank those who truly make this place go round and round...To those who serve in this service, from the piano, special music, sound board, but I'd like to also thank those who's servant heart is not clearly on display on Sunday morning...From those who work in the nursery, children's area, from those who cut the grass and those who paint walls and those who faithfully make sure networks and ministries run smoothly...

Calvary is not built by preachers but built by God through those who tirelessly serve not for their own glory but to build the glory of God and His kingdom... To all you I want to say thank you...

The second thought is comes from a article I read this week...I read this quote in a news article this week and I thought it was quite interesting...

A conservative theologian writes, "The modern Christian mind is starved, and as a result we have small, impoverished souls..." I have found this to be all too true...

Friends...We must be people of the Word...**Seeking out to learn the word**...To fix the atrophy of our Christian minds...

But friends let us also remember...that in our pursuit to feed our minds remember to fuel our hearts and activate our souls...

(Pray)

**Good morning**...Please go ahead and open up your Bibles to Matthew 7, We are coming toward the end of our time in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7...Through our extensive discussion, we have seen the picture of the Christian life, principles and practices to live it by, prohibitions to avoid in the Christian life and then we looked at the value of others and the value of the kingdom of God in last week's message...

Based on the scripture reading this morning...You may have picked up on the topic in today's passage...

This morning I want to talk to you about prayer...about "prayer" specifically today's passage discusses the value of persistent prayer...

**Transition:** Persistent Prayer is an essential component to anyone's spiritual life and is essential to my spiritual life...

Asking:

Perhaps the greatest time of persistent prayer in Laurel and I's lives was in the weeks, months and years leading up to seminary...

If you were here in January 2011, then you may remember Laurel and I setting out to seminary...

But what you may not know was that the journey to Seminary was many years in the making...When I was 20 years old, I felt called to full-time ministry... In fact, The call to go into full-time ministry was in this exact sanctuary...It was on a Sunday morning during a Sunday morning service...in that exact pew when I felt the call of God to be a pastor...

And at that exact moment, I knew it was my destiny to go to Dallas Theological Seminary...From all the stories and influence from the pastors here and from all the author's I read...The seminary I knew I had to go to was Dallas Theological Seminary....In fact I didn't even look at another seminary...It was Dallas or nothing...

Yet, at the time of my calling I was only 20 years old and I had no idea how to accomplish this tall task...So, on that Sunday morning, I began asking the Lord for a way to go...For a way to let me enter the gate to Dallas Theological Seminary...

Seeking:

Yet over the years, our prayers kept progressing...from asking to seeking...from asking for direction to seeking out answers...

As some of you may know, Laurel and I married in this church in March 2008...The urgency and desire became stronger and stronger to go to seminary...I felt like a race horse in the gate...But I made a promise...I made a promise that Laurel would finish her bachelor's degree before seminary...

So, here I am working three additional years to put Laurel through school...all while seeking opportunities to go to seminary but still not having clarity as to how it would all work out...

Knocking:

Then, our prayers kept progressing...going from asking for direction, to seeking answers...to knocking at opportunities...

As Laurel got closer and closer to the finish line then we went beyond seeking answers to knocking for opportunities to move...

But knocking was the most terrifying part of heading to seminary...Laurel and I did our homework seeking answer and knocking for opportunities but it really all came down answering one question....

Years and years in the making came down to question...God's question was, "Do you trust me?" Do you trust me enough to step up to the precipice of fear and leave Huntsville to go to seminary?"

So, Laurel and I went out knocking...Stepping out on faith and trust...Laurel and I set out in January 2011 off to Dallas Theological Seminary...With a U-Haul full of stuff... The only thing we knew when we left was where we would live...

When we left Huntsville, We had no jobs, no friends, not much money...our only security was God telling us to go and so off we went...

Now, to the world, and albeit some Christians, this seems a bit irresponsible...Even to myself, I am who is a meticulous planner...I need all my I's dotted and t's crossed...But that isn't what the Lord told us to do...If we waited to have everything figured out then we would have never left...Laurel and I asked, sought and then it was time to knock...

Transition: Well...If we didn't knock...If we didn't go we would have never seen God work...

**Because within a month...**Laurel had a full-time job on campus which not only gave us a full-time salary but also gave us half off tuition...And within the first month I had two jobs...

Then the story gets even better...After a year of drudging through paying half tuition for seminary...A person random person walks up to me and says...I will pay it.

So, within a year...Laurel and I all of our needs met...But we would have never seen this if we didn't ask, seek and knock...And in fact, if we walked back from the precipice of trust... we would not be here today...

**Transition:** Perhaps, some of you have stories like this where God flexed his muscle and showed up...Where the only explainable cause was God...I encourage you to hold tightly onto those memories...never let them slip from your memory...

Yet, I imagine when I mention the word "prayer" to some of stories of great triumph come to mind...But I also imagine there is also another flip side for many of us today ...

Perhaps when I share about "prayer" some of us feel a profound sense of disappointment...

Perhaps for every triumphant story of prayer there may be two or three or perhaps 10 prayers that remain unanswered...Perhaps some of us have been praying for the salvation of loved ones to no avail...Perhaps some of us have prayed for healing from illness only for the issue to persist, and perhaps our energy to pray diminishes as we feel that they fall on deaf ears....

Well this morning we are discussing "prayer" specifically the **value of persistent prayer...**

It is my hope this morning to give us each a different perspective on prayer...to not only give us a firm Biblical understanding of persistent prayer but then to also understand how God's

answers....

**Transition:** So, come with me to Matthew 7, Matthew 7 and we will be looking at verses 7-11 this morning...And we will begin this morning with verse 7...

**Read Matthew 7:7,** “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

In this particular verse there are three commands coupled with three promises...What are the commands?

“Ask” , “Seek”, “Knock”

Morphologically, Each of these three are verbs that breakdown to Present Tense, Active voice, Imperative mood...

**The imperative mood** is tell me that Ask, Seek and Knock are commands...In other words, that these aren't optional...That in order to follow Christ...In order to live this Christian life we must...We must... We must ask, seek and knock...

**Present Tense** is giving me a continual or iterative aspect...which tells me to Never stop asking, never stop seeking, never stop knocking...That when we pray...that when we come before a Holy God with our prayer requests that we never stop praying...we never stop asking, seeking and knocking...

**Can I say it another way?** That asking once is not good enough...When we make requests before God that we must ask then ask again and again...

**But there is still a question that must be asked about these three words Ask, Seek and Knock...**Do these three imperative commands all refer to the same thing or are they different?

Scholars are on both sides of the fence whether asking, seeking and knocking are all the same thing or if they are different...

Based on the context and the words themselves, it seems best that the three different words are three different aspects of prayer...In fact, they seem to be a progression...that we first Ask for direction, then Seek answers and then Knock at opportunities...

**Think About It:** When we ventured to seminary...if we stopped at asking then seminary would have been a daydream...Wishing the Lord would magically roll out the red carpet showing me the clear path...If we had not sought or knocked, then I'd probably still be renting cars...

If we stopped at only seeking then seminary would have stopped as a plan...It would have stopped with all the plans and maps to fulfilling our dream but it would have stopped as a plan that was pushed aside and I may still be renting cars...

Yet, our prayers did not stop as a daydream or a plan...The Lord was commanding us to

knock...To actually go and Really trust Him for all the questions and prayers that could not be answered by keeping seminary as a daydream or only a plan...

**Friends in prayer...We must ask, seek and knock...**We must ask for direction, seek answers and knock for opportunities...

**We must Ask:** Coming to God with our issues or problems...Coming to God with our questions and doubts...We must come to God with our hopes and concerns...With our desires and dreams...But friends let us not stop there...

**Seeking:** If our prayers remain unanswered...then perhaps the Lord wants you to track further out toward the ledge of trust...to seek answers...Perhaps if our job does not supply our needs then perhaps the Lord is wishing you to see a second job for a way to provide...

**Knocking:** If our prayers still remain unanswered...then perhaps the Lord is asking us to walk up to the edge of the ledge of trust and trust Him to actually provide us with a new job, or pack the U-Haul and head to seminary...Perhaps the Lord is waiting for us...

Perhaps, He is waiting for us to actually knock and trust Him in order to find and answer...

But as I reflect upon this passage, I find something to be true of life...In life we usually stop with just asking...In fact, typically I've found that we stop at asking once...But it seems that we should not only persistent in prayer by asking for direction but then seeking answers and opportunities...

**Which makes me wonder...**Have I been praying in the wrong way for years? Prayer is not a one hit wonder but it is something to be sought...and sought continually...

**Point #1: Never stop asking, seeking and knocking...**

**Transition:** But Why should we never stop asking, seeking and knocking? Why should we persistent in prayer...?

**Look at verse 8,** "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Why ask? **Point #2: Never stop asking, seeking and knocking knowing God will answer...**

I want you to do something...I want you to compare verses 7 and 8...Right where you are...Notice that they basically repeat the same thing...

Why would Jesus repeat virtually the same verse? **To give us assurance...**

That surely if we ask, seek and knock that God **will** certainly answer our prayers...That God is listening and He will answer our prayers...

This is confirmed with the verbs indicative mood in verse 7 and 8...Indicative mood is the mood of certainty...That God will certainly answer our prayers if we come to Him asking, seeking and knocking...

**Transition:** So, if we ask, seek and knock...We must be assured God will answer...God will answer...But there is still one more question in this text...**But how does God answer?** “

### **Look at verses 9-11**

“<sup>9</sup> Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?  
<sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? <sup>11</sup> If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

**Point #3: Never stop asking, seeking and knocking knowing God will answer *with good*...**

**Notice with me the assumption of Jesus...Look back at verse 11...it says...** “<sup>11</sup> If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

What is Jesus' assumption? Jesus' assumption is that we are evil...That even though we are evil yet we still give our children good things....

So then how much more since God is perfect and never changing will he not give us good things and in fact freely give us all things...” Let us remember...<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him **freely give us all things?**”

Since God is perfect He will give us only good things...

The scripture confirms to us that if we ask, seek and knock of the Lord that  
#1 He will answer #2: His answer will be good...

**Transition: But there is a problem...Actually there are two problems...**

**Problem #1:** When God's answer is something we did not expect **Problem #2:** When God seems not to answer at all...

**Problem #1:** When God's answer is something we did not expect

The passage tells us that God gives us only good things...Yet there is a problem...Because many of us have received answers that are actually different than what we expected...In fact, sometimes we receive answers that are the **opposite** of what we prayed...

**Transition:** Friends, if you have ever received an answer opposing your prayer then you are not alone...Because I personally have run into the same issue...I prayed for safety for my children...that they grow up healthy and happy...that they grow up loving and following the Lord and raise children of their own in a like manner...I've prayed that the Lord would put a fortress of protection and love around each one of them...to only see the Lord answer my prayer

by taking our child from this earth in the dead of night...

**Yet friends, I want to provide us with assurance even when God seems not to answer with good...**

Friends, let us first remember God's ways are mysterious...I stand here not pretending to understand with a finite mind the desires and will of our infinite God...

Second, I'd like to share a verse and a thought that keeps me hanging on... **The bar of faith that I hold onto is Romans 8:28, "All things work together for the good to those who love God...To those called according to His purpose..;"**

The bar of faith and hope, the bar of hope and assurance that I grip everyday is that **Somehow, Someway**...All the trial and tragedies of life....All the scars I carry will work out for good...

Somehow, someway the painful answers that we did not expect will work for good...that God is above the trees to our lives seeing the big picture allowing pain to creep in only to lead me closer to the good He has destined for us...

When we encounter Problem #1: When God's answer is something we did not expect let us remember that God is working all these together for good...That he is a good Father working even the tragedies of life for our benefit and His glory...

**Transition:** But there is a second problem with prayer...The second problem arises when we compare life to the Bible...

**Problem #2:** When God seems not to answer at all...

The scripture tells us that God does answer prayers...but so many of us walk around with scars and worries, with burdens and doubt, with a backpack full of exhaustion and bewilderment waiting for God to finally give us the answer to our prayers...

But Why do so many of our prayers remain unanswered? So, I'd like to take a minute and give us 4 reason why God does not answer prayers...

**Reason #1: Perhaps, the issue is not God but rather us...**

The first reason God may not be answering your prayer is because we may be looking in the wrong direction... we are looking for an answer in the wrong place...

**Let me give you a quick story to illustrate...Perhaps you may be familiar with this story but it illustrates this issue well...**

A man was trapped in his house during a flood. So, He began praying to God to rescue him. He had a vision in his head of God's hand reaching down from heaven and lifting him to safety. The water started to rise in his house. His neighbor urged him to leave and offered him a ride to safety. The man yelled back, "I am waiting for God to save me." The neighbor drove off in his pick-up truck.

The man continued to pray and hold on to his vision. As the water began rising in his house, he had to climb up to the roof. A boat came by with some people heading for safe ground. They yelled at the man to grab a rope they were ready to throw and take him to safety. He told them that he was waiting for God to save him. They shook their heads and moved on.

The man continued to pray, believing with all his heart that he would be saved by God. The flood waters continued to rise. A helicopter flew by and a voice came over a loudspeaker offering to lower a ladder and take him off the roof. The man waved the helicopter away, shouting back that he was waiting for God to save him. The helicopter left. The flooding water came over the roof and caught him up and swept him away.

When he reached heaven and asked, “God, why did you not save me? I believed in you with all my heart. Why did you let me drown?” God replied, “I sent you a pick-up truck, a boat and a helicopter and you refused all of them. What else could I possibly do for you?”

Perhaps his answer is right underneath your nose yet we are looking in the wrong direction...

**Reason #2: Perhaps, we have (as my wife calls it) strategic ignorance...**Perhaps we are not wanting the answer we received so we blame God for His silence...

When we typically get answers we don't want we say... Well, God you didn't really mean that...

- Well, God you didn't really call me into ministry...

- Well, God you didn't really mean for me to quit my job

**Reason #3:** Perhaps God is not answering because He is waiting for you... His answer is waiting for you to start seeking the answer or start knocking for opportunities... Laurel and I's question to pursue seminary and the questions of provisions would have remained unanswered if we did not seek and knock... Perhaps His answers require us to pursue Him all the more and end the ready-made God service that we expect...

Perhaps your answer is out there... Perhaps God is waiting for you...

**Reason #4:** Perhaps God has not answered... Perhaps God has not answered **YET**...

Let me stick a saying in your mind that I heard in seminary, “God's timing is always perfect but never convenient...”, “God's timing is always perfect but never convenient...”

What is interesting about the Greek in verse 7 is that it is a future indicative... As mentioned earlier, the indicative mood tells me that “YES!! God will certainly answer!”

**But the verb is a future tense...** So, yet God WILL certainly answer but his answer is in the future... His answer is often not immediate... God rarely gives us fast food, ready-made answers (if he did then we wouldn't need to trust him) but rather God gives us the answer down the road... Days, weeks or even perhaps years down the road God will give us our answer... God's answer may not be immediate but He will answer us...

**But Listen Friends...**I want to drive something home...I want to drive something into your mind so hard that it stays in there for the rest of your life...You ready?

BUT WHEN WE PRAY...

GOD WILL ANSWER US!!!! DID YOU HEAR THAT? GOD WILL ANSWER US...GOD WILL ANSWER US...

GOD WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS...AND We can TRUST Him to answer us...Because His answers are not dependent on us... WHEN WE ASK, HE ANSWERS...Ask, and it **will be given to you**; <sup>[d]</sup>seek, and **you will find**; <sup>[e]</sup>knock, and it will be opened to you.

**That is a promise...THAT** WHEN WE ASK the guarantee of an answer is placed upon the shoulders of an omnipotent God...

His answers are dependent upon His nature...And since the God we worship...is GOD...since He is omnipresent, never changing...Since He is a covenant keeping God...Since He is the beginning and the end...Never shifting...ever steady...Since He is a God that loves His children... THEN HE WILL ANSWER US... GOD WILL ANSWER US...

Stand confident that He will answer since He is God and HE wants only for our good

**YOU:**

In order to answer the question So What? I hope to provide 3 Practical Steps to Prayer

**Step #1: Ask With Persistence...** (break these out)

Never stop asking, seeking and knocking...Yet, seeking the answer may not be what we want or what we were looking for but God will answer with God...Never stop asking, seeking, Knocking...

**Step #2: Seek the Blindfold....**In other words...seek to Take off the Blinders, Biases and Impatience that often blind us to God's answers....When it comes to prayer, We often run around blindfolded...

And then we wonder why God never answers...Yet oftentimes His answers are right around us...

**Friends...**let us take the blindfold off...let us take off our ready-made instant gratification expectation of God and let us look around us and see how God is answering our prayers...

Because I guarantee God is answering many of our prayers if we are willing to look...

**Step #3: Knock with Trust-** Knock with trust in God...That when we pray, let us pray and knock...let us seek with trust...That we walk up to the ledge of trust and difficult decisions...stepping out on faith knowing that He will bring only good...

Friends...Let us ask with persistence, seek the blindfold that blinds us, and knock with trust...A person who does pray with persistence and with trust will be someone that will leave a legacy far reaching beyond their 80 years...They will be marked by lasting spiritual fruit...

Let us remember what D.L. Moody said, “The world has yet to see what the Lord can do with a person who is truly His...”

Let us pray...