

Ask and It Will be Given to You - Petition and Intercession

Series: Prayer

Date: 3 May 2026, 4th Sunday after Easter

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Psalm 86, Luke 11.1-13, 18.1-8, James 5.13-18

When I was in my early twenties I got a phone call from a friend, Josh. It was 2am, and my friend had called to ask me for a lift. I can't remember what the circumstance was. He had got himself into some kind of fix. On the surface it was an outrageous request. But actually, despite the bleary eyes, I was delighted that he had called. Because it told me he knew I really was his friend and he could trust me to be able to help. Friendship is not an exchange, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. It's being there for each other when you need it most.

We don't need to be taught to ask for help as kids. That's what our parents and other grown ups are there for! But we can forget how to ask as adults. We can think there is shame in asking for help, and especially for big things that show our weakness and vulnerability. We're meant to be independent, self sufficient, able to stand on our own two feet. We can be like that with God as well. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses warned the people of Israel that when they came into prosperity and abundance they might become proud and forget the LORD and say, 'My power and strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.'¹ We can live as though we don't need God's help, and think we can do life on our own, and even when we're in a pickle we can find it hard to call out to God for help.

But Jesus says, again and again,² in the Gospels, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

Today we're continuing our series on Prayer and we're looking at our most basic instinct when it comes to prayer - Asking. Putting up our hand and asking for God's help.

We'll look at the 4 points:

- Why can we ask?
- Does asking really work?
- How should we ask?
- What should we ask for?

¹ Deuteronomy 8.10-18

² Luke 11.9-10, Matthew 7.7-8

My hope is that you'll come away from this sermon and do just what Jesus says - ask God. So let's dive in.

1. Why can we ask?

I want to look at 2 reasons Jesus gives as to why we can ask God for things in prayer.

The first comes from our Gospel reading in Luke 11, and the equivalent in Matthew 7.

Jesus says,

⁹Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

I sometimes do a bad job of listening to my kids when they come and ask me for things. Maybe I'm tired and grumpy and I snap at a completely reasonable request. Sometimes I have to apologise for how I react to my kids' requests. But despite my failures as a Dad, I want the best for my kids. All the time. And when they ask for something, I will give them what I think they need. It might be a piece of fruit instead of a chocolate for morning tea, but I've still got some chocolate stashed away for a treat.

Jesus' argument is very simple. You and I are flawed people. But we still know how to give good gifts to our kids. Well, we are God's children. He is our heavenly Father. He loves us infinitely and perfectly. He knows what we need. So how much more will he give good gifts to his children?

Jesus gives a second reason we can ask God for things, and that is because **we ask in his name**. In preparing this sermon I discovered something in John's Gospel I had never really noticed before. In John 14-16, Jesus tells us 6 times, "whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."³ Here we're reminded of what we saw back in our first sermon on prayer: that in prayer we participate in Jesus' prayer to his Father. Through Jesus, we have access to God the Father in the Holy Spirit.⁴ This is why when we pray we will often finish with something like, "We ask these things *through Jesus Christ our Lord*," because we are offering our prayers, in Jesus name.

Jesus gives 3 reasons why we should pray in his name.

³ John 14.12-14, 15.7-8, 16, 16.23-24

⁴ Ephesians 2.18

First, so that the Father will be glorified. So John 14.12: “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” In answering our prayers, Jesus brings glory to the Father.

Second, so that we as his disciples bear much fruit. So John 15.7-8:

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Asking in Jesus’ name helps us remain in Jesus, and as he answers this brings fruit in our lives and in the world.

Third, so that our joy may be complete. John 16.23-24:

Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

So we can ask our Father, in Jesus name, and he will answer our prayers - to bring glory to his name, to bear fruit in us, and to make our joy complete.

2. Does asking really work?

But this brings us to point 2. Does asking really work? Does God really answer prayers? There’s two questions we often ask here. First, doesn’t God already know what is going to happen? And second, if he is sovereign, in charge of everything, why would my prayers make any difference?

In answering this question, people can sometimes focus on prayer as the way that God changes me. That is to say, yes God is sovereign, and through prayer he changes me so that I come to align with his will and accept his purposes and grow more like Christ. This is absolutely true.

The heart of prayer is a surrendering to God’s will. Jesus shows us this both when he teaches us to pray and when we see him wrestling in prayer in the garden. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your will be done”. And then in Gethsemane he prays, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”⁵

⁵ Mark 14.26

In a very human way, Jesus did not want to go through the suffering and spiritual anguish he was about to endure. He knew all things were possible for God. So he asked if there was another way. But he also submitted to God's will.

We do this as well in prayer. We bring the desires of our heart to God. It can be big and small. We bring him all our requests. For exams. For a job. For buying a house. For a marriage partner. For our kids. Health. Your worries. We trust all things are possible for him. But we also say, "your will be done."

In James 4 we read,

You do not have because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.⁶

I think this is something of what it means to pray in Jesus' name. It is to seek his glory and his purposes in our prayers. I find Psalm 37.4 really helpful here: "Take delight in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart." The more I delight in God, the more my heart will align with his will and purposes, and I will see him answer prayer. As Jesus says in John's Gospel, "Apart from me, you can do nothing."⁷

The prayer of John Chrysostom at the end of the Anglican Service of Morning Prayer sums this up well:

Lord, you have given us grace to agree in these our prayers, and you have promised that when two or three gather in your name you will grant their requests. Fulfil now, Lord, our desires and prayers as may be best for us. Grant us, in this life, knowledge of your truth and in the age to come, life eternal. Amen

So through prayer God does change us. But we would be selling Jesus short if we said that was all prayer does. He tells us again and again, "Ask and it will be given you." "Whatever you ask for in my name the Father will give you." Through prayer God really does change the world. Here theologians and ordinary Christians throughout the ages have found that yes, God is sovereign, but prayer is his ordained way for us to participate in his work in the world. He has promised to act, but he wants us to ask him to. Prayer is how we receive his promises.

Our reading from James is full of confidence.

⁶ James 4.2-3

⁷ John 15.5

¹⁴Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

And then he gives the example of Elijah from the Old Testament, praying for a drought to bring the king of Israel to repentance, and then praying again for rain after three and a half years, and God sending rain. Now if you know the story of Elijah, you'll know he was directed to both these prayers as God's prophet. But he was full of doubt as well as faith. James also tells us unconfessed sin can get in the way of God hearing our prayers. It's why confession should always be part of our prayers. James' point is that God hears and answers the prayers of his people. So ask, and ask for big things, things only God can do like healing or bringing rain!

I've seen God answer this kind of big prayer in my life. When I was in my early twenties I went on a short term mission trip with my parents to PNG. We traveled between villages on dinghies with outboard motors on the open sea. One morning we left at dawn to beat a storm that was coming in. But we didn't make it. The storm came and the boats were getting swamped by the rain and the waves. Just at the point of disaster the rain cleared, the waves settled and we motored through a double rainbow. When we got back to Port Moresby at the end of the trip the youth pastor of the church that had sent us asked us if there was a storm early that particular morning while we were in the boats. We said yes. He then told us that that same morning while praying, he had a vision of our boats caught in the storm. He knew if he didn't pray there would be a disaster. He called together a bunch of others from the church and they prayed God would calm the storm and take us safely to our destination.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. God really does answer our prayers.

3. How should we ask?

Ok, let's have a look at the last 2 points quickly. How should we ask?

In readings from Luke Jesus gives us two stories to teach us that we should ask boldly and persistently. In Luke 11 Jesus tells a story. Imagine you go to a friend at midnight and ask for 3 loaves of bread to provide for someone who has stopped by at your house. Your friend is reluctant to give you anything. It's the middle of the night. Everyone is in bed. This is just a nuisance. But Jesus finishes,

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.⁸

Boldly. Shameless audacity. Is that how you would describe what you ask God for? Yes, do that work of aligning your heart to his will. But ask big! Ask outrageously! Jesus tells us to.

In early December 2018 we signed a contract to do \$2.2 million worth of restoration work on St George's. We'd received \$600,000, but our fundraising efforts for the remainder had come to nothing. But we were praying and we signed the contract in faith that God would provide. Then, the week before Christmas, I got a call from our local member. He said, "Victor, I'm doing a press conference outside your church on Friday. I've asked 5 prime ministers, and at last one has said yes! I've secured \$1.6 million to restore the church."

We read Jesus' second story in Luke 18. Here a widow keeps pestering a judge to give her justice. The judge was corrupt and kept putting her off, but eventually he said, "because this widow keeps bothering me, I'll see that she gets justice." And Jesus says, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."⁹ Here, as well as highlighting God's concern for justice, Jesus teaches us to be persistent in prayer. If a corrupt judge gives justice just to get a persistent widow to stop bothering him, how much more will God hear and answer the persistent prayers of his people?

Some years ago Mieneke asked the Morning Prayer team to pray for her daughter who had been diagnosed with leukemia. She was also pregnant after years of trying. She was terrified she might lose her daughter and the baby. So we prayed. Every day. For months and months. And God was gracious to answer our prayers. A healthy girl was born, and Mieneke's daughter is still in remission. Now, she did all the right things. She saw doctors, she had treatment. At the same time we asked as Jesus told us to, and God heard and answered.

Jesus tells us to ask God boldly and persistently. He will answer. Maybe not how we expect. Often not when we want. But he will answer.

4. What should we ask for?

⁸ Luke 11.8

⁹ Luke 18.6-7

I've spent most of our time looking at how Jesus tells us to ask God. We're children of our heavenly Father. We can ask God for anything at any time. Nothing is too small for him. Our life is open before him and we're fools to cut him out of any part of it. So sure, ask for God to provide that parking spot or help you find your keys. But we can also ask for his priorities. This is how we can abide with Jesus and pray in his name and for his glory. The more you read of the Bible, the more you will learn what God's priorities are. We'll just touch on 2.

The Lord's prayer gives us two priorities. We pray "Your Kingdom Come". We can pray for the spread of the Gospel, that people might come to know Christ as Saviour and Lord, and that we might see a foretaste of the perfect justice and peace he will bring when he comes again. Specifically we can pray for the work of our church and for our mission partners, the Durdins, Andy Maskell, Clara and Anglicare. We can pray for people we love who we long for to come to Christ. We can pray for God to change us and change others - to grow the fruit of the Spirit in us.

We also pray, "Give us today our daily bread". This is where we pray for God to provide for our needs and the needs of others. Again this can have a world focus, a community focus, a church focus and a personal focus. We can pray for material needs. We can pray for spiritual needs. And it helps to be specific. Some years ago I heard a seminar of church leadership from Ric Thorpe who is now archbishop of Melbourne. He said, "Jesus says, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest field.' So, if you have a position you need filled at church, write down an accurate job description and then pray God will send this worker in his field. God will always answer this prayer." We do that each week as a staff team. We have a list of the vacant volunteer positions at church that we ask God to fill. And he has answered every time. Sometimes he's provided even before we've asked.

Jesus says, "Ask and you will receive." Of course sometimes God says no, like he did when Jesus' prayed in the garden. We're going to think more about that next week. But today we've seen that God is our loving heavenly Father. He wants to give us good gifts. All we need to do is ask and he will answer.

Let me finish with one of my favourite prayers from the Book of Common Prayer.

Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray,
and give more than either we desire or deserve:

pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid,
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask,
save through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord. **Amen**¹⁰

¹⁰ BCP, Collect 12th Sunday after Trinity