

Collide – Why Pray?

Matthew Vander Els • 2018-10-23 • foundedintruth.com

MAIN VERSES

[Matthew 7:7](#) • [Matthew 7:8](#) • [Matthew 7:9](#) • [Matthew 7:10](#) • [Matthew 7:11](#) • [Matthew 6:7](#) • [Matthew 6:8](#) • [Luke 11:9](#) • [Luke 11:13](#) • [Luke 18:1](#) • [Luke 18:5](#) • [Luke 18:7](#) • [Luke 18:8](#) • [Philippians 4:6](#) • [James 4:3](#) • [2 Corinthians 6:1](#) • [Genesis 1:26](#) • [Genesis 3:8](#) • [Jeremiah 31:3](#)

The Most Powerful Sermon Ever Preached

As we continue, I say it every week, and I'm not even ashamed about it, because I want you to take this away from this section of Scripture. This is the most powerful sermon ever preached in history. Not the one that I'm preaching, the one I'm preaching about. Yeah, it's the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon that this rabbi, this no-name rabbi from Galilee, got up on a mountain with authority and gave this interpretation, re-giving the Torah almost, on how you keep Torah, how Torah is supposed to be manifest in your life, not simply as frontlets between your eyes and signs in your hand, but from the heart. How to keep Torah like a [Jeremiah 31](#) person. And it's been a very powerful sermon. I know we've kind of worked slowly through it. Was last week pretty good? Like last week was a big deal for me, and I'm sure no one else, right? About judgment and judging others in your heart and what the effects of that are and how hypocritical we sometimes look when we choose to label the sins in our own life as not really that important just to make room for others and to look down on others.

Why Pray? What's the Point?

And this week we're diving into a section of scripture that is slightly intimidating just because of the topic. And what's the title going to be? I don't know what the title should be. I mean, it's about prayer and it's about confidence in God's word and God's promises. And I finally found myself frustrated with the topic of prayer because there are many different views on prayer across the board in Christianity and in Judaism. Sometimes they're all different, but everybody sees a verse in Scripture that they want to take and make the platform for what prayer is and define the mechanics and the gears, how prayer works. And it's great until you look at all of the verses about prayer in the Bible and you begin to become intimidated at the reality that prayer

truly is a mystery in what its effects are, but that doesn't stop the expectation of what ancient Israel had when they prayed, and it certainly didn't stop the expectation that the early believers had when they prayed. And so in my frustration, I finally chose this title: Why Pray? What's the point? And I hope that we'll dive into that here shortly.

So if you turn with me to Matthew chapter 7, we're going to start in verse 7. And yeah, we're going to continue. So Yeshua just left off with this extremely exaggerated, like almost comedic, but serious hyperbolic situation about having a big log stuck in your face and then trying to do surgery on someone else's eye. And he jumped straight over to this situation. Matthew chapter 7, starting at verse 7. We're listening very well. This is great. Everyone. Guys, the Bible is narrative. It tells a story about God. And the reason why this book highlights different things throughout the story and doesn't really veer off into other areas is because the biblical authors wanted you to focus on what the Bible is trying to tell you.

For example, there's not a book about dinosaurs in the Bible. I was having a discussion about this with someone the other day. And they were making this huge deal about dinosaurs in the Bible. And where are they? And is it in Job? And I'm like, Leviathan isn't really. But that's fine. It just became this obsession about dinosaurs. And I'm like, maybe there's not a book of Shalomasaur or something like that somewhere in the Tanakh. Because the biblical authors—inspired and God-breathed by the Holy Spirit—did not think that was really an important thing to put as the basis of your energy, time, and focus. Maybe they wanted to tell you a story with the words on the page about something that you ought to focus on.

God's Story of Relationship and Authority

And this story is written to tell you about a God who wants to have a relationship with you. It's the story of the Bible. And a God who not just wants a relationship with you, but has invited you to co-rule creation alongside him. He gives you everything you need. And this is how the story begins in [Genesis 1](#) and 2. Be my image bearers. Go out and make more image bearers. Tend to the garden. Expand the garden. Fill the earth. Rule over it the way that I intended. The birds in the air, every aspect, rule over it the way I intended.

And coincidentally, this is also how the book ends, which is neat. And when you begin the story of the Bible, for example—and this may be off topic—but I find it fascinating how sometimes we start reading the Bible at the wrong place and it totally shifts our view about the story and what we're supposed to be focused on. For example, if you start the story of the Bible in [Genesis 3](#), it affects the entire story. It shoots ripples and waves through the entire story, and it makes it

all about a serpent and sin. The entire story is about serpent and sin. But if you actually start the Bible in [Genesis 1](#), it becomes a story about God's good creation, engulfed in his rule and his reign and his complete peace and shalom. Not that sin isn't a part of that, but defeating sin wasn't the ultimate goal. That's not where everything stopped in the story.

The Gospel: God's Kingdom Manifesting

And this is exactly what the gospel is formed around—the good news of God's kingdom manifesting, just as it always was, just like it's always supposed to be. God's kingdom overtaking creation, every aspect, not simply defeating sin and death, but establishing something greater on top of it, a victory that would stand forever. The good news that there is a way to move forward in your life to reach [Genesis 1](#), where you are no longer separated from God, where you are no longer a slave to the earth that produces briars and thickets, where you're no longer a slave to the system of Babel in their tower, where you're no longer a slave to the inhospitable culture of Sodom and Gomorrah, where you're no longer a slave in Egypt, where you're no longer a slave in Babylon, where you're no longer a slave to sin and death—the things that push you away from God—and that's good news. It's the good news that God sent his son to defeat the powers and the rulers that have enslaved us in our hearts. And you can be brought out of that. You can experience the world the way God meant it to be, a life beside him, close to him. Where sin, death, and distractions none can stand in the power of the resurrected Yeshua.

And I bring that up because this verse, this verse is slightly controversial. Slightly. I know some of you guys are reading this verse and you're like, "Controversy? Matt's not talking about Nephilim. What is controversial about this aspect of Scripture?" Guys, this is one of the boldest things the Bible ever says. This right here is one of the boldest phrases of Scripture the Bible ever says. And you'll get it. And if we just read this section of Scripture—not just anyone, not just a specific group of people—what's it say? Everyone. Everyone who asks will receive.

Everyone Who Asks Will Receive

Can I be real? Can I be real today? I'm going to be real today. It may upset people to be real when we're talking about such an intimate subject such as prayer. And I thought about different ways that I could go through this section of Scripture. Maybe I could sugarcoat it. Maybe I could talk about praying and different things like, yeah, God always answers prayer, but it's not always in the way that we think, and just kind of move on and glide through this section of Scripture without addressing prayer.

The problem with this blanket statement: What's the problem with the blanket statement that everyone who asks will receive? What's the problem? What's the real problem that many of us may have experienced with that? Has anyone ever asked God for something? Has anyone ever not gotten it? That's the elephant in the room surrounding this verse. And that's what I hope to kind of address today. And I'm not even going to try to be delicate about it. Yeah. This verse has been used as a staple for many ministries that exist that fully believe exactly what this verse is seen as saying. But then when someone does ask something of God and they don't receive it, these same ministries or pastors or even fellow believers will tell them—I say this from experience of being on this end of it—that, well, your faith just wasn't strong enough. Your faith wasn't strong enough. That's why you didn't get X, Y, Z. Or you did not get the formula right. Or the concoction—the concoction to get the things that you wanted—was not the right recipe in the cauldron called prayer. You weren't good enough for God to listen to, essentially.

The Mystery of Prayer

And I do not believe that is true based on who I am told God is in the rest of the Bible. And I'm not going to stand here today and say I'm going to unlock the divine mystery behind prayer because there is a mystery behind it. But I would like for this message to give hope and more so to give confidence to anyone here who may be struggling at times to pray. Has anyone ever struggled with prayer before? Just a few. Okay. I'm not the only one. I see. I have. I didn't get something that I wanted in life. And because of it, I stopped praying to God. Because God is always an easy target in the midst of trials and tragedy. And what was bad, if I can be completely transparent, was that I was still in leadership here when this happened. This was years ago. It's not like there was this low point in my life, like everything was fine and dandy. I just stopped praying to God. What's the point if God doesn't answer prayers? What's the point of praying?

And it got so bad because I have this strike and revolt against God—me praying to God when you have friends and other people in ministry and whatnot, people come to you wanting prayer. So it's like a wall—what do you do? So I'd actually pray for other people, but I would refuse to pray to God, just me and him. And this wasn't a long section of my life, but I want to be transparent because I have a feeling that maybe one of you has or is experiencing that right now. You ever look back and just see how stupid you acted when you made attempts to spite God? Yeah, I got him.

I want to invite you to look at the Bible and Scripture together and the character the Bible tells us about our God. And I do not want you to leave here today discouraged any longer about

prayer, if that's a struggle in your life. In fact, my hope is that you will begin to pray, not simply more often. Like Yeshua says in chapter 6, right? No, I want you—when you pray, I want you to realize that you are in the middle of connecting heaven to earth in that moment, and presenting yourself through a very real God in a very real throne room. And my hope is that this is how you will see and feel your prayer life, because I believe that is what Yeshua is actually talking about in this set of scriptures and many others.

Ask, Seek, Knock

So let's jump in, right? Everyone's excited. This is good. So I'm sure that everyone has heard the old Sunday school acronym involving this section of Sermon on the Mount, right? And what do we have? We have ask, we have seek, we have knock, and we take the first letter of each word and it creates the acronym of... Isn't that brilliant? It doesn't work in the Greek. It only works really in the English. But isn't that amazing? Isn't that amazing? It was a joke, sorry. But it looks cool. So Yeshua begins with this hope of receiving what we petition for, right? And the hope of finding what we seek and the hope of opening what we knock for. And I'm not minimizing this in this message. In fact, we're going to readdress it here in just a little bit. I do believe prayers are answered. I do believe God hears our cries and the cries of his children. I do believe that God can and does produce miracles in this world in a very real tangible way. But I want to focus on something deeper than our expectations. On this expectation of praying in order just to get something. Because what is the expectation if we really have no idea what it's founded on and what the platform is that it's supposed to be jumping off of?

And so we focus on ask but then we miss the example he uses to connect this statement to the people he's speaking to on a mount. What example does he use? He uses the example of a father and a... Do we think this is relevant? The correct answer is yes. In verse 9, he says, So what character role is Yeshua painting of God? A father. Yes, a father. Our bad, horrible, unloyal, unfaithful father? No, a loving father. A very much so loving and compassionate father that cares and loves and wants to be part of his children's life.

A Loving Father

Benjamin, our son, just turned three this past September. And he is kind of amazing. I won't lie. And so I'm going to talk about my boy in a minute. Yeah, you have to sit through it. It's great. So my routine every single day—I try to get up as early as possible. I usually end up getting between 4 and 5.30, but I would love to get up earlier. That'd be great because I like the calm. I do dishes and make coffee, and that's my routine, and I like it. I enjoy this time because it's

quiet. It's a rare occurrence when you have a toddler. I spend this time in prayer. I spend this time studying the Word, starting my daily task list, emailing people back, handling things around the house, working on projects, X, Y, Z.

Around 7.30, something happens in the Vander Ailes residence, and I hear my most favorite sound in the world—pitter-patter, little feet running around the hardwood floors. These urgent footsteps of a toddler that has now awakened to the world around him. I'll hear harsh steps pacing towards the stairs, then get slightly muffled by the carpet. You'll hear them slowing in pace. Then they begin up the stairs until finally they arrive at my office door where I am greeted with an overly excited. And he comes in and he gives me a big old hug. And this is truly a routine that I pray will never stop. That's how it unfolds most mornings. And I love my son. I thought that was him. That one's smaller. I love my son. My son depends on me and he depends on my love for him.

And sometimes he will show up in my office first thing in the morning holding these foam swords, right, that he goes around. And he'll look at me with these two swords that are like as big as him, like these little play foam things. Daddy, you play swords with me? Do you think for one moment with that face that he has on, there is any doubt that I would like to play swords with him? So I get out of my office chair at 7.32 a.m. and we run around the house chasing each other, smacking the swords against each other. He goes, I'm guard! And we have a great time together. And I love it.

Yeshua, he calls God Daddy. Daddy! This is what kind of the emphasis is. He's Father. And this is a setup that he's attempting to reassure his disciples and everyone else on the side of the mountain with. The people on the side of the mountain are families. Right? Lay folk. These are not the rich. These are not the religious elite. These are the Galilean residentials. These are people with kids. Like, on the way up the mountain, there was probably a few families that struggled with getting their kids to act right, to go hear Jesus talk. You ever think about that? Does that kind of make it real? Most parents in here can visualize that situation happening. Get up here. Come on. We've got to go see Jesus. You sure was going to talk? Come on.

The Families on the Mountain

And the people on the side of the mountain—like, I could see them arriving frustrated, maybe impatient with their kids, just a few of them. But in this moment when Yeshua is speaking these words: "Would you give a stone to your child instead of bread?" Imagine a father sitting down Indian style with his son in his lap, a mother sitting next to him holding the hand of her

daughter. The father has his toddler right here listening to the words of this rabbi while holding him tightly. And he hears these words. He hears: "Why do you think God would not love you as much so, no more than you love your own son?" This is what Yeshua's building up in this section of scripture. That those feelings, that is what Yeshua wanted you to be impacted by.

You have a loving father. You have a God that is not distant, but is close. And this God, he loves you. He loves you more so than the connection and the love that you have for your son. And if you're like me, it's like, nah—I don't think he can love me more than that. Because that's just this infinite love. I would never not love or diminish that. If you love your son that way, how much more? How much more?

The Bank and the Sucker

And we were running some errands the other day. So I took Ben with me because cute kid. I like having him in the back seat, looking at clouds and airplanes and stuff. It's pretty neat. So we went to the bank first. Ben walks in with me and I set him on the countertop to withdraw some money. This is where Benjamin begins to wrap—not one, not two, but three bank tellers—around his little fingers, just instantly. Picture this: there are other customers in line, and there are three bank tellers devoted to my son. He looks over, sees the jar of suckers at the bank, and in that voice he says, "Daddy, can I have a sucker?" With the voice, with the face, with the reaching arm—what do you think my answer is? Of course! Of course, you're gonna have a sucker! Everybody's like, oh—

So I wanted to give this to him. I want you to have this, son. And I want you to know that I love you because of this action. I want you to have this because you want it and I care about you. And so, yes, you can have a sucker. And the lady, the bank teller, graciously gave him one. It was so funny because she gave him a colorless sucker. I don't know what flavor a colorless sucker is. But she was like, yeah, if he carries it out and drops it on the carpet or your car, it won't leave a stain. And I'm like, well, that's very friendly of you. That's very nice. So he gets this sucker and he sticks it in his mouth. And for a moment there, he just has this contemplation, like this look. And he pulls it out and he starts to give it to me. Here, Daddy, you take it.

The Sucker Story

What's the matter, Ben? "I don't want it." Did you want another flavor? "Yes." So he got the sucker and the lady said okay. She brings the whole jar. "What flavor do you want?" "I want the brown one." He likes root beer. So he gets it, and it's just this incredible experience. I'll be

honest, this kid made me feel like the most amazing dad ever. I was really selfish and very prideful. This is my son. Look what this says about me, y'all. I was in that moment. That's fleshly, I'm just letting you know. So we leave the bank, and he's still being showered with smiles and people waving at him as we go—just an amazing experience. And next we go to the post office, and he was good. And then we got to another bank to make a little payment on a small car loan we got. So we walk into bank number two. He waves to the tellers and realizes we're in a bank and looks at me. He asks, "Daddy, can I have a sucker?" He sees the jar of suckers. This bank has bigger suckers. Why? Bigger. But he's already had like one and a half. So what did I tell him? "No, son, you can't have a sucker here. You don't need one right now. You just had one." Benjamin did not say okay, put on a smile, and wave at all the tellers and be happy. Benjamin proceeded to make what we would call a scene. And I ended up leaving the bank carrying him sideways out the door. And I did not leave with that satisfaction of being the greatest dad today.

Fatherhood and Boundaries

Benjamin asks for suckers a lot. He's very persistent. He likes suckers. We have them at the house for potty training—it helps. So sometimes Benjamin wants a sucker first thing in the morning. Sometimes in the afternoon. Last night, he asked at bedtime. What kind of father would I be if I gave him candy all the time for every meal? See, it's my job to consider what's my plan for Benjamin. What's my plan for my entire home? What is the most appropriate time for suckers? And I also have to consider other factors in the home. How will this have long-term impacts on him if we have siblings, a mom, dad, and so on. Sucker marks all over the couch. I also have to worry about little things called cavities, right? Does that mean I want Benjamin to stop asking? Does that mean I want Benjamin to stop talking to me? No. Do I want Benjamin to stop engaging with me just because there are certain times that I say no or yes? No. Why? Because I'm still his father and I still love him.

What Prayer Really Is

And in Yeshua's example, this isn't even about treats and candy. This is about bread, a basic daily need. And my son comes to me and he asks for a meal. What kind of father would I be if I gave him a handful of rocks? That's what Yeshua is saying. Yeshua is talking about something a bit more deep concerning God than simply getting things. You can isolate this section of the story and be like, "I'm going to ask for anything I want and I'm going to make a case against God," like I did. But I would argue that you're missing the real substance of what Yeshua is

trying to say. Yeshua talks a lot about prayer—quite a lot. And if you read all the things that Yeshua says, all of them, it gets quite confusing. A lot of people accuse the Bible of being contradictory, and I don't believe that. I don't, even if they can show examples. I believe the writers of the New Testament are trying to give you something bigger than what you're seeing, if that's the case.

Prayer's Many Faces

And on one hand, in Luke's account—Luke chapter 11—Yeshua's talking about prayer and he talks about a friend who comes over in the middle of the dang night when you're asleep and your family's asleep and he starts banging on the door. "Hey, I need something from you. I need something from you." Have you ever had a friend banging on the door in the middle of the night? It kind of upsets you, right? You can wait till morning. No, banging on the door. "No, no, I need it now. I need it now. Get up, get up, get up, get up, get up." So you get frustrated and you walk over to the door and you give it to him. And Yeshua paints this as a picture of prayer with God. Luke chapter 18 talks about a poor widow that has injustice, and she keeps bugging this unrighteous judge until finally he comes around and gives her the justice that she needs. Again, he's like, "If this unrighteous judge will do it for a widow, how much more will my Father?" Ask, ask, ask, ask, ask. Keep asking. So we should continue persisting in prayer to God for things that we want. But then you have folks that will tell you that you're demeaning God's glory when you try to keep asking over and over and over again, and they'll cite all kinds of scriptures about honoring God. And how do we take Yeshua's words on prayer just one chapter before this—in the Lord's Prayer? Yeshua said, "Don't keep babbling and repeating prayers. Don't keep exhausting it over and over and over again. Because that is what the pagans do. The pagans think that if they keep repeating themselves, God will finally give them what they want." And Yeshua says here, "Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't be like them. Don't be like them."

The Paradox of Prayer

So I guess prayer isn't exactly black and white like I was thinking or hoping, because this is kind of confusing. But that's okay. I know I need to keep pursuing God with my requests and petitions, but there's a certain format, I guess. And then Yeshua drops this bomb. You ready? "For the Father knows what you need before you ask him." Anyone ever read that and been like, that made no sense and that's causing my head to hurt and I'm just going to turn the page? Just me. Just me. So we are to pray a lot for things that we want. Or are we not to pray a lot for the same things, repeating prayers over and over again? Or—well, here we go. God knows what we

need before we ask him. So why do we ask? We can't ask that because we're believers, right? We cannot ask the question of why do we pray if God already knows. Why do we? We can't ask that. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to break that rule because this is a question that I've asked myself, and I'm sure that many of you here today have also asked it.

God's Goodness, Not a Formula

Prayer, as it appears, is not just a black-and-white formula. It is not a genie in a bottle that if you rub the lamp just the right way, it's not a concoction that you mix in the right cauldron like a potion. It is something else completely. And then Yeshua lets this one out of the bag about God knowing what you're going to pray for before you need it. So this brings actually a bigger question than the formula of prayer: Why are we asking him for things if he already knows? If he already knows what? Why do we ask if we already know? Like, what's the point of prayer? Why pray? Why pray? And I could be so much more productive in the mornings if I didn't have to stop everything, close my eyes, get on my knees, and talk to God. You could. He already knows, so why doesn't he just—he knows my petitions. What if, guys, what if, just like Proverbs and Isaiah teach concerning prayer, prayer is highlighted and it draws its power from something else completely, and that is God's goodness. What if Yeshua here is not saying that if you pray really, really, really hard for that dream car, God is going to give it to you? What if Yeshua is saying God's goodness is always, always going to be available, given, and accessible to you because that is what kind of God that we serve. That is the Father that we serve.

What God Really Wants to Hear

What does God want us to pray when he already knows what we need? Or would I dare say already knows what we want? Guys, I truly believe God wants to hear from his children. God wants you to know that he loves you and he wants to know that you love him. And God wants to talk to you. And God wants to spend a special time, a close, intimate time with you. And it's not about getting stuff as much as it is being held by your Father in that moment. You ever think the disciples prayed and did not get what they wanted? Scripture says that. You ever think that they felt like God was distant because of that? I believe this is the proper context for setting up what Yeshua is speaking about concerning prayer. God is not far. God does respond. And you can know that you have a Father in heaven and you have access to his throne in heaven here on earth because of prayer. This is the potency of what prayer is. And this is the type of God that Yeshua presents to us. This is the type of God that the Bible presents to us. A God who creates man to be in communion with him. A God who invites man to be co-workers with

him in his creation. A God who, despite man rejecting him, charges a small group of people, Israel, to work with him to impact every single person on the world so they could all see, feel, and know God's goodness.

God's Goodness and Co-Workers in the Kingdom

This is a God that sent his son, the divine and mortal united, to display this very goodness and to show others what it looks like. This type of God that has called you, you, to be his co-worker in his kingdom. [2 Corinthians 6.1](#) has a great verse when Paul highlights this. He calls you out: you are God's co-workers in this kingdom.

Guys, does anyone have a co-worker they work with on earth? A job or whatnot? Do you have a relationship with them? What happens if you don't have a relationship with them? Do things get abrasive quick? What is the point? Before you can ask a petition and a request, before you can go to them with a charge or a petition or a need, what's important to have there? A relationship.

This is what Yeshua is trying to build up in all of the Sermon on the Mount—that you have very real access to a very big God in a very personal manner. And this God is not someone who's far away. This God is one that's chasing you to have a relationship with you. Does God answer prayers? Yes. Should you ask God? Yes. Should you ask him a lot? Yeah. But the launching pad, the platform of giving your requests and petitions to God is based on something bigger. And that is the reality that there is a God that wants a relationship with you. And that is the basis of all prayer.

God has a desire to know you. Know you. Fascinating. My God has a desire to know his creation. And he's good. And this is something that I stand on in the biblical narrative.

The Uniqueness of Scripture

The amazing thing about our Bible, the stories and the poems in it, is that our Bible is so unique. This is Bible Geek Time. Anyone actually read the Bible and kind of studied the background and ancient Near Eastern texts that surround it and the parallels? There's some pretty cool stuff in there. You see me getting excited. Sorry, a couple of you are getting excited. I know. I know. I know.

And I'm talking about when it was written and when it was being compiled and just how radical it was in contrast to other nations. Like how radical the formula and commandments in the

Torah were to other nations. Like the stories and the creation accounts of other nations—how the Bible is just so unique and potent.

If you've studied ancient Babylonian history, they had a little flood story in their creation account as well. But their gods came together and created man from mud to be their slaves, to be their servants. We need slaves. We're lazy. We need a bunch of servants. See, our God is so amazing in our biblical text. Our creation story starts with a God that says, "No, I'm going to create man to come alongside me, to co-rule this creation with me who will be my image bearer. I'm going to create a man that will have a relationship with me and I with him." And that gets me excited about the character of the God of the Bible, about the character of the Father that I have in heaven, according to Yeshua.

My God and the story of Israel's God is that God did not want slaves. He wants to know you. This is the platform of prayer. This is the foundation of all prayer. So, Bible geek stuff. This is neat. I'm getting excited. You see me changing gears. Exit ramp. Can we do one of those right now?

Good Things and the Holy Spirit

This is actually highlighted in some of the gospel accounts. We've read this section in [Matthew 7](#), right? But if you turn with me, [Matthew 7](#) says, "If you then, who are evil, will 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 what I've underlined there. What is that? Good things, right?

Now, this is kind of a trap in 2018 because when we think of good things, what do we think of? The cars, the TV. We think of that big, fat 401K, that security. The older I get, the more I'm starting to value the idea of having a big, fat life insurance policy. Anyone like being an adult? Yeah, don't grow up if you are. It's a trap. But these are the good things that I imagine. So these are the good things that I end up praying for. And I'm like, God, we need a new vehicle. But since I have your attention, can I have this vehicle? No, not the used one. The new one that's in the display, right? God, it sure would be nice to make more money in my job. Can I have this one? No, not down here. The management position over there. These are the good things that we sometimes pray for.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but I don't think that this should be the foundation of all prayer. So Matthew records this as good things—agathos in the Greek. And [Luke 11](#), Luke chapter 11 says something a little bit differently. So Luke chapter 11 is going over the same

section of scripture, the same story when Yeshua is preaching the same thing about prayer. And in Luke chapter 11, verse 9, he says this. He says, "Know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" This is two different people, two different biblical authors talking about the same conversation. And they chose to record it differently.

Guys, I would submit that these are not contradictory verses and contradictory accounts. I believe both authors are trying to say the same thing. One uses the Greek *agathos*; the other is *hagios pneuma*, Holy Spirit. As you can see, this is not simply about getting things. It's about knowing God's goodness—that he would give his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the entity that connects creation with his love. The entity that was distinct from him and also part of him in [Genesis 1](#), hovering over creation, ready to engage creation with God's love. The entity that came down from heaven as a dove onto Yeshua, showering him with the love of the Father. The same entity that is given to you, that you would know, feel, and come across and have access to the love and the goodness of God.

This is the same Spirit. How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who simply ask him? To feel his goodness, to give the good things to those who ask.

Prayer as Relationship and Invitation

We don't simply pray to impress God. We pray to invite God. Invite God into our lives in that moment. We pray to fellowship with God as co-workers, just as Paul says in [2 Corinthians 6](#). We pray for God to develop within us, and we pray to acknowledge our dependence on God. Prayer binds us to God in a very real, divine, supernatural way.

And if you're struggling in areas of prayer today, I first want to say, I get it. I also want to say, I also want to urge you to engage in the most powerful practice that God has given to you. Pray. Seek. Knock. Even if you're quiet on your face, devote a time to God. Allow heaven to connect with earth in that moment. Listen to God's breath as you lie there, totally open, now. You are in his goodness. And you're in that environment at that moment.

Guys, we've grown up being taught that the only reason that we pray is to ask for things. And then we grow up not in a pattern of prayer because we only pray when we need things. And we only pray during times of trial and hardship. And we only pray when we think, "Oh, Lord, now I need God." You need God every day. When you're up high, when you're down low. The foundation of prayer is the relationship that God has said he wants with you. Is that worth even

a few minutes of your day just to acknowledge that he is good and acknowledge that he can give you and engulf you in his goodness?

I grew up, very much so, not in my home but in my churches being taught that prayer is something you do only when you want to get something. And so my devastation, when the one time I really wanted something, I really needed something, really really really really really really really really bad and that prayer was not answered and it devastated me and it devastated what I felt about my relationship with God and that's the danger of having a foundation of God being a genie in a bottle as your prayer life. God does grant prayers, he does give prayers, he does answer prayers, he does give good things on top of the Holy Spirit and his goodness. I've seen it happen. I've prayed for things and a very shocking, like, it really happened. And I'm sure many of you can testify that as well. And I've prayed for things and they didn't.

Remember, there was a time in the story where our king prayed for something. He didn't get what he prayed for in the garden. Now, as I said before, I'm not nor will I ever dismiss the assertion that this verse does carry, along with many others, that God is waiting and anxious to bring about your petitions and your requests. Paul states in his letter to Philippi in 4.6, "Do not be anxious about anything. In every situation, by prayer, petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Absolutely. God yearns for his children to present their requests to him. And we do. And we do it in times of struggle. And we do it in times of pain. And we do it for the sake of others. And we do it for the sake of our own reputation and his reputation. And we should. We should never, ever, ever, ever, ever stop making our requests known to him. Ever. God can and God does act at the cries of his children.

And when you go before God with the intention of laying down your requests, your petitions at his feet on his throne, you do it boldly. You do it boldly. You boldly go before God because you acknowledge through your confidence the power and might that he has. And you gain that confidence by knowing his goodness. You gain that confidence of knowing that he is big enough for your request. And he is big enough to meet your every need. You know this because you know his reputation. He has the divine ability to handle anything. Many people exploit these verses, abuse them to make prayer about selfish pursuit. I have never done that. But the Bible is clear with instructions about going into prayer with the wrong heart as well. See over here, Yeshua says, everyone asks for anything and they get it. James commentates, I believe, in this section of the Sermon on the Mount in James chapter 4, verse 3. He says, when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your own pleasures.

Again, not guilty. There are many, many of us that are all too eager to pray for the wrong things. It's true. But I don't really think that's the problem that plagues us in the believing community. I think the problem that truly plagues us as believers in this fellowship and believers across the world is that we're not nearly eager enough to ask for the right things.

Asking for the Right Things

And the right things don't always simply mean moral attributes that God can give you to make you. If you dare to be the person that asks for holiness or humility or patience, God help you, right? What Yeshua is saying here is that the right things mean what we need day to day, which in the Sermon on the Mount God is just as concerned about as we are. And if he is a father, we need to treat him like one. Not a dictator, not a bureaucrat, not a politician. A father who is concerned with your every need, no matter how small. Unlike many earthly fathers, God always has time for you whenever and forever, however long you want it.

And something you may see is that the more you pray, the more you mature as a child of God. The more we mature as children of God. And we increasingly, through this practice, become aware of his concerns and then we seek to share in them, to share alongside God as his co-workers in the suffering and the sorrow of the state of the world around us. We will begin wanting to pray for that more than even ourselves. But within the kingdom-centered prayer that Yeshua himself taught in chapter 6 of Matthew, that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we're taught to pray for what we need here and now, in the reality that we exist in.

So, what is stopping you? Maybe your past is filled with rug burns on your knees, wet spots on your shirt from the tears and agony of crying out as a result of unanswered prayers. That's a reality I refuse to sugarcoat. Why? Because I know what it feels like. I also know that despite prayer being a mystery of the divine, that we ourselves are even allowed to partake in it. But we ought not be so surprised when God is so supremely wise and powerful and loving that he reveals himself through prayer. I do know that prayer works. But the foundation of why we pray is not the mechanics of a divine vending machine. The why is a reason to experience God's loving, caring, divine goodness and to take part in that experience.

The Mystery of Prayer

From that platform alone, our petitions go up to the greatest Father. And I've seen prayer work. I've seen miracles work. I don't want to come across as this guy who doesn't think prayer works, or who doesn't think that Yeshua is literal in other places where he talks about praying. And

Paul is praying without seeing. No, absolutely. But I want to try to build a stronger foundation than the divine recipe that some people get right and some people don't.

Archbishop William Temple, he's the bishop of the Church of England. He died in the mid-20th century. He has an amazing quote that I love because I've seen prayer work, miracles happen, and I've seen God's glory lifted up in the physical, and it's incredible. And he says something here. He says, when I pray, coincidences happen. And when I don't pray, they don't. This revered man of God, when asked about prayer and how prayer works and the divine mechanics, this is what he came up with. When I pray, things happen. And when I don't, they don't. So that's my experience with prayer, and that's why I pray. Because I know God is alive, and I know he works.

God is not something that I can control. God is not something I can manipulate. God is not something I can exploit. I meet him where he asked me to meet him, on my knees. And from there, the relationship flourishes, more so from his side than mine. There are some brilliant Christian teachers and thinkers that also, when I was reading commentary, I found this interesting, that also cautiously assert that as God's kingdom comes and manifests on earth through its ambassadors, that those who find the kingdom in Yeshua, that it's not God's will to bring it all at once. They seem to suggest that we couldn't bear it if he did. I read one commentary that portrayed God as an artist working with very difficult material. And when we pray, it's as if the material works with God instead of against him. Neat little word pictures there or word visions.

The Goodness of God Revealed

I don't fully understand prayer. I come before you today very open about that. I don't know how to make prayer something that you can hit certain buttons and type in a special code and have it work the way you want. God says, meet me. Yeshua says, ask. Yeshua says, view this time as a time with your father, not a time with someone who's far away that you're just trying to reach and get their attention. God is here. God knows your needs. God knows your wants. God knows what you're going to ask before you ask it. The point is that the goodness of God is revealed and developed within your life because of the time that you spend with him.

And so worship team, you guys can come up so we can conclude services. Guys, we treat God as the Father He is, and we let Him know things that are going on in our life. When's the last time that you spoke to God and just let Him know how things are in your life? You know He knows how things are going in your life, but when's the last time you spoke with Him and sat down with Him and said, God, this is how I'm feeling?

We may do a series about prayer in the Psalms, and we'll talk about David. David let God know how things were going in his life, and it's in a way that we would probably feel uncomfortable with. Tell God what's going on in your life. And if you're upset and if you're angry and you find yourself trying to spite God by not praying, maybe you should have that conversation with him. Ask, search, knock, and see what happens. Expect surprises on the way, but don't expect that God will ever, ever, ever let you down. This is the thread of the entire Sermon on the Mount, and I love that.

Prayer Puts Things in the Right Order

So prayer isn't magical, but prayer does help put things in the right order. It's an acknowledgment by us, the lowly creatures down here, that there is a God who made us, and he's not just our creator but a divine being, a divine father who is deeply interested in your life and in your affairs. Prayer seeks a power that is beyond what we can imagine, and it can obtain and achieve that which only God can do. That's why we pray.

So as we conclude services, the same way we entered in, I invite you. I invite you during this time to close your eyes. I invite you to lift your hands up. Maybe you've not spoken to God in a very real way in a while. We sometimes get caught up in canned prayers because we pray the same thing and it just becomes this vague, non-intimate. Talk to God as a father sitting there beside you. Anxious to hear how your day was. Anxious to hear your requests. Anxious to hear your footsteps running towards him. Anxious to hear you saying, Daddy, and I have a sucker. Daddy, will you come and spend time with me today? Anxious to engage in that relationship with you.

So guys, we have a prayer team that's always off to the sides. And maybe you're here today and you just don't have the words to say to the Father. Maybe you're in a circumstance or facing something in your life that is hard. I invite you, dear one, in worship, to go to one of the members of our prayer team. They are not God, but they will boldly stand with you and they will pray beside you. And they will hold your hand as you enter in before God's throne. And so I invite you to stand as we conclude services the same way that we entered in with praise and worship.

Guys, I don't know what's going on in your life. Talk to God. He is listening. He wants you to ask. He wants you to seek. He wants you to knock. He cannot wait to give you the good things of His goodness and glory in your life. Shalom. I'm Matthew Vander Els, and I hope you enjoyed

this message. Founded in Truth exists to cultivate a fellowship of image bearers that live the redeemed life only Yeshua can give.

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