

## **KNOCK SEEK ASK – A SERIES ABOUT PRAYER**

### **Sunday PM July 3<sup>rd</sup>**

We're going to be talking about prayer in this series. We were prompted to follow this theme from the end of Colossians, our last series of talks, when the Apostle Paul said as he closed his letter, this is Colossians 5:2

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

Prayer was something Paul considered very important. So important that at the end of nearly all his letters to the churches, there is a verse encouraging his readers to pray. In Philippians 4:6, Paul says

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

In Ephesians 6:18

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

In Galatians 4:6, Paul says

*Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

The title of the series, Knock, Seek, Ask, comes from Matthew 7 which I'm going to read in a moment. Later in the series, we're going to look at the Lord's Prayer but initially I'm going to be looking at what prayer is and maybe a bit of what it isn't! So let's read from

### **Matthew 7:7-12**

<sup>7</sup> *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

<sup>9</sup> *"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup> If 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! <sup>12</sup> So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

So what is prayer? I asked on Facebook and Twitter for people to give me their definition of prayer. I'd like to say I had loads of response but I didn't. I had one response that was simply two words. 'Wishful thinking'.

What is prayer? Wishful thinking. It saddened me a little because whilst in a tiny part, prayer is bringing our wishes or hopes before God, it is so, so much more. A man called Ed Cole said 'Wishing will never be a substitute for prayer.' That's because prayer is not just about thinking about what we want before God, its about building relationship. It's something solid, not something dreamy. It's based on a real relationship, not something wishy-washy or a fantasy.

Oswald Chambers said that 'our ordinary views of prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer as a means for getting something for ourselves; the Bible idea of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.'

Let's go back to what prayer is, then. Prayer is the word we use to describe our communications with God. Prayer, communicating and listening to God, is a gift so that we can know more and more about Him, who He has made us to be, what He wants for us in our lives, what He has given us and how we can serve Him and give Him glory but also just so that we can spend time with this Heavenly Father who loves us more than anyone else has ever or could ever – He loves us so much He sent His Son, Jesus to die for us. Prayer isn't just talking to God, it's worship, it's singing, it's active, it's in service. I think that makes prayer a little more than wishful thinking.

When we want build a relationship, a friendship with someone, we introduce ourselves, we meet up, we talk to each other, we do stuff together, walk, sport, art, chill, eat – and the more we know of each other, the more the relationship grows, gets stronger, becomes more trusting, more loving. That's just exactly what God our Father wants with us. He already loves us and knows us through and through but He wants us, His children, to get to know Him better and walk with Him in our lives, to fully trust in Him because He knows what's is best for us. That's what prayer is. That's what prayer does, it builds our relationship with God.

I wonder if you can remember your first prayer? Some of you may say, well it was when I asked Jesus to be my Saviour. Maybe something like this:

*'Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and need forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ shed His precious blood and died for my sin. I am willing to turn from sin. I invite Christ into my heart and life as my personal Saviour.'*

I can remember what I first prayed. I'd been in church services all my childhood, but when I was 14 or so, I realised that I needed to be saved by Jesus. Nothing more than that. I didn't really understand why but I had two things in my heart that kept nagging at me. First, I really liked Peter's answer to Jesus' question to the disciples in Matthew 16 v's 15-16 'Who do YOU say that I am?', something inside me, in my heart, answered in the same way as Peter who replied: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God'. Second, I believed the Bible was true, that what was recorded there was the Word of God. And there was a verse that kept sounding in my heart or ringing in my head from the verses I read.

*'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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.'*

So I knew I needed to be saved, I knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God and I knew that if I asked, it would be given to me, that I was to seek and I would find and that if I knocked, the door would be opened. So I asked and asked and asked that I would be saved and prayed that the Bible said that if I asked I would receive. This was in bits and pieces, sometimes I was taken up with MY life again and what I wanted but I kept coming back to these things and kept asking that I would be saved.

God answered my prayer when I was 17. That was three years of just praying this prayer and not understanding much else. I was listening to a minister speaking on the story of Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8. After he had heard the 'good news' about Jesus, the eunuch says to Philip, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?' The NIV gives Philip's answer in the footnotes as v37: Philip said 'if you believe with all your heart, you may'. The eunuch answered 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'. God spoke that straight into my heart. I could say, like Peter had done and the eunuch: 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God' and I knew in my heart and mind that I was saved by

Jesus. Just like the eunuch, I ‘went on my way rejoicing’ and I was baptised a year later!

The first of the questions this week will ask you to share testimony with your group about the first time you prayed – I’m mentioning it now so that you have a little time to think about it.

We might be saying, ‘I can’t pray, I don’t have the words, I don’t know what to say, how can I get to know someone I can’t see’. There are two things here. Firstly, we are not praying, totally blind, to whom we are praying. We have the Bible that teaches us all about who God is, it teaches us about the way He loves and cares for His people, how He helps them when they call on Him and much more. So we have a starting point. When we read the Bible, we learn about who God is – so we are already starting to build a relationship. If you feel you don’t have the words, pray the words from the Bible. If you believe they are true, inspired by God himself, then you can have no fear of what you are saying being wrong. I found this of great comfort to me – I still do.

So who are we praying to? We are praying to Almighty God, our Creator, one is wholly good – the Holy One. The book of Psalms in the Bible is full of prayers: here’s an example in Psalm 71:21-23:

*I will praise you with the harp  
for your faithfulness, O my God;  
I will sing praise to you with the lyre,  
O Holy One of Israel.  
<sup>23</sup> My lips will shout for joy  
when I sing praise to you—  
I, whom you have redeemed.*

But you might be asking ‘how can I pray to this God, this Holy One’ when I am always doing wrong. How is it possible that we can approach a holy God when we know that He cannot look on sin? In the book of Habakkuk (1:12) in the Old Testament it says

LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

So how can we pray to this Holy God?

Through amazing grace! If we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, if we are saved through the death of Jesus on the cross, then through the blood of Jesus Christ we have access to God. He looks at us through the purity of Jesus. We are made pure through Jesus' sacrifice. We have done nothing to deserve it, we are sinners but He died for us to renew us, to renew our relationship with God, to bring us back to how life began, where it's recorded in Genesis, that God walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day.

We have just remembered Jesus' sacrifice by taking the bread and wine together. That sacrifice brought us back into communion with a Holy God. It enables us to stand before God like the verse in Philippians says '*in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*'

In Hebrews 4:14-16, we are told about what Jesus does for us:

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

So when we say at the end of a prayer, 'we ask this in the name of Jesus', or 'through the blood of Jesus' or 'for Jesus' sake', we are acknowledging that we can only come to God in prayer through Jesus' sacrifice for us because we are made clean and holy in God's sight in Jesus.

But that isn't all! We also have the help of the Holy Spirit to pray. When we are followers of Jesus, we are given the Holy Spirit, who lives in us – He is our Comforter and Counsellor, the Bible says, and so when we pray, however unable to form the right words we feel or even when we are praising God, the Spirit in us enables us to approach God in the right way. That's why you hear the leaders in church asking for the Spirit to come so that when we come before God in worship and prayer, we are praying and worshipping in God's will. This extends to the

way we live our individual lives too – we need the Holy Spirit to fill us and teach us because the way we live our lives is also prayer if we live in obedience to God's will. In Romans 8:26-27

*the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. <sup>27</sup> And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

In Jude 1: 20-21

*But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

So let's conclude this talk. We asked 'what is prayer'? Prayer is our communication with God.

Why do we pray? We pray to build a relationship with our Heavenly Father, to get to know Him more and more and in learning about His will, to walk in His will and in His Kingdom. By praying, we are doing what Matthew 6:33 says:

*'seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (our food, clothing, other needs for us to live) will be given to you as well'*

Who are we praying to? We're praying to the Holy One, Almighty God. How can we do that when we are sinners? We are freed to come before this Holy God by Jesus' purity and sacrifice for us.

How do we know what to say, what to ask for? Because when we became Christians, we have been given the Holy Spirit, Comforter and Counsellor who gives us the right words to say. So we ask the Holy Spirit to help us, to fill us so that when we pray, we pray in God's will.

I will close now and next week we are going to look at what we should pray for in a lot more detail through investigating the Lord's Prayer.

But I just wanted to say that the wonderful thing that I have seen as I prepared this is the way that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit all work together as one. And we, as Christians, are part of this fellowship, this union, this communion, this family. When we pray we are building relationship with this Triune God of Love, being a part in and finding belonging and purpose in their Kingdom. I find it staggering that a sinner like me can be part of this.

Let's get into our discussion groups – the questions are these:

If you can, share your first prayer or the time when you first prayed.

Does God answer prayer? Can you give an example of when you've had an answer to a specific prayer?

How important is prayer?