

The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

Chapter 31: An Encouragement to Prayer

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Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Mt. 7:7-11).

In this section, Jesus turns His attention once again to prayer. Earlier, He instructed the disciples on how not to pray and then gave them His own model prayer. Now He strongly encourages them to persevere in prayer and does so with an amazing promise relating to our heavenly Father. This is no doubt one of the most comforting promises found in all of sacred Scripture. We are to “ask, seek and knock” because our Father loves us and delights to give good gifts to His children. By way of introduction, there are a number of things to note regarding this passage.

First, is this section a self-contained unit or does it have some connection with the immediate or broader context? Commentators and expositors are divided over this question. Although there is certainly no obvious connection between what immediately precedes and follows, the content of the sermon as a whole makes this promise and encouragement to prayer a fitting aspect of the sermon. Any believer who looks at this sermon in depth will immediately recognize that he has not met the standard of moral and spiritual excellence set forth in our Lord’s teaching. Therefore, the natural response to this sermon for Christians will be to seek God’s help to meet these amazing demands of discipleship and holiness. We all know that we fall short in many areas and we may be tempted to be discouraged or even doubt our salvation. Consequently, our Lord encourages us to seek divine assistance and promises us that our heavenly Father will come to our aid. God’s assistance is to be sought with faith because of His loving character and it is to be sought diligently and persistently. This teaching on prayer is an implicit acknowledgement that the Christian life is a battle; that we can only meet the uncertainties, problems and struggles in life by constantly relying on God in prayer. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.”

Second, the structure of this pericope is beautiful and almost poetic. There are three imperatives followed by complementary assertions of God’s faithfulness. We have a triple imperative, followed by a triple explanation in the indicative. The two statements are perfectly balanced and form a deeply memorable saying. The imperatives are in the present tense and indicate that this “asking, seeking and knocking” is to be the habitual practice of every Christian.

Many scholars note a progression to this threefold exhortation: “ask, seek, knock.” In other words, there is a rising scale of intensity in these words. Asking refers to a verbal request. Seeking implies asking plus diligent petitioning. The person who seeks stops what he is doing and goes out and looks. Knocking implies that the person asking and seeking must persevere in those activities. By way of illustration, it is like a little child who calls out to his mother. When

the mother does not respond, the child gets up and looks around the house for his mother. If the mother is behind a closed door, the child continues to ask and seek but now he also keeps knocking on the door until he gets a response. The point is not that prayer contains three separate things, but that the one act of prayer must involve diligence, persistence and patience. This assertion is supported by our Lord's use of this same saying immediately after the parable of the importunate friend in Luke 11: "I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs" (v. 8).

Third, what is it that Christians are to request and seek out or knock to receive? On this, the passage is silent. Some believe that it refers to seeking the Holy Spirit, or the righteousness, humility, wisdom, purity and love that the sermon demands. Others think it refers to eschatological blessings and still others the ordinary, everyday ongoing needs of Christians. Given the fact that the passage is silent on this matter, it is best to view this three-fold command as applicable to petitionary prayer in general. We are to be persistent in all kinds of prayers.

Fourth, given the universal nature of the Savior's promise ("for everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened") it is important that we interpret this passage within the broad context of Scripture. Many professing Christians have mistakenly seized upon this verse to support the idea that if we have enough faith and ask God for something that He must grant our request. This, in essence, is the teaching of the so-called "word of faith" movement. They say that if we ask with true faith, that God will grant us whatever we want. Then they usually go on to talk about the wonderful material blessings that they have obtained using this formula. One notable prosperity preacher would often brag, "You may have Chevrolet faith, but I have Cadillac faith." People who follow these false teachers find out very quickly that God does not give them everything they ask for and the result is often doubt, depression and even despair. Because their requests were not granted, they usually think that there must be something wrong with their faith or, even worse, some begin to question the veracity of the Word of God.

All of this misunderstanding and distress is completely unnecessary, for other portions of Scripture that speak of prayer make it clear that Jesus is not speaking unconditionally. This is evident from the following considerations: (1) Our asking must be according to God's will. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 Jn. 5:14). Christ who had perfect faith asked God to remove the cup of His wrath "if it is possible" and said "not as I will, but as You will" (Mt. 26:39; cf. v. 42). We can "ask, seek and knock" until we are blue in the face and it will not make any difference if we do not ask according to God's will. We should be very thankful that God does not give us everything we ask for because He knows what we need better than we do and always gives us that which is good for our own spiritual welfare. Probably all of us can look back and think of occasions where unanswered prayers ended up being a great blessing. At the time, we may have strongly wanted a certain job, or to marry a certain woman, or to move to a certain place. Consequently, we may have prayed earnestly for such and such to come to pass. But now we look back and thank God that He knew what we needed and closed certain doors while opening others. It is a great blessing that God does not give us everything we want.

(2) The apostle Paul prayed three times to have "a thorn in the flesh" removed from him (2 Cor. 12:8) and was denied this request by Christ (v. 9). Are we to believe that the greatest of apostles had less faith than the prosperity charlatans? No, of course not! The Redeemer was glorified in Paul's weakness and the apostle was full of joy that he was strengthened by this affliction (see v. 10).

(3) In the explanatory parable given after the encouragement to prayer, our Lord says that the Father only gives us “good things” (Mt. 7:11). “So then if we ask for good things, he grants them; if we ask for things which are not good (either not good in themselves, or not good for us or for others, directly or indirectly, immediately or ultimately) he denies them; and only he knows the difference.”¹

(4) James says that Christians do not receive what they ask for when they ask with wrong motives. “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (4:3). The cause for failure in this situation lies in man and not God who is always faithful to His promises. If we pray for blessings with a carnal and selfish goal instead of God’s glory and our own sanctification, then we should not expect God to hear us. As we noted earlier, God does not always give us what we want, but rather what we need for our own edification.

As we turn our attention to this passage, there are three areas that need to be considered. First, there is the three-fold command. Second there is a three-fold reason why this command should be carried out. Third, Jesus explains the reason with an illustration about our heavenly Father who gives.

The Three-fold Command

The three imperatives all refer to the same activity (petitionary prayer to God) and are intended to show the necessity of persistence in prayer to Jehovah. This theme is found throughout the Bible. Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord and would not let go of Him until He blessed him (Gen. 32:24-26). This amazing scene does not impugn God’s omnipotence, but it does effectively portray the importance of prevailing in prayer. Like Jacob, we must continually seek God’s blessings and persevere in prayer until we get results. Of Jacob’s victory Calvin writes, “A wonderful method of triumphing; where the Lord, to whose power all praise is entirely due, yet chooses that feeble man shall excel as a conqueror, and thus raises him on high with special eulogy. At the same time he commends the invincible perseverance of Jacob, who, having endured a long and severe conflict, still strenuously maintains his ground.”² When Jacob encountered opposition, prayers and tears were his weapons (Hos. 12:4). The difficulties, oppositions, afflictions and tragedies in life must not silence our prayers, but rather increase them. Faith will hold its ground in the day of battle.

Importunate prayer is taught in Isaiah 62:7 which reads, “And give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” We are to constantly and fervently pray on behalf of the church of Christ. We are to give God no rest until our prayers are answered. Paul said something similar when he discussed prayer as a weapon for Christian warfare in Ephesians 6:18: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” This constancy in prayer is commanded by Jesus in Luke 18:1: “...that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” This teaching is supported by the parable of the unjust judge who finally gives in to the woman because of her continual coming unto him (Lk. 18:5). God will, without fail, grant the requests of his people who cry unto Him “day and night” (Lk. 18:7). That is, those who are in the habit of continual prayer. Likewise, in 1 Thessalonians, Paul exhorts believers to “pray without ceasing” (5:17). Prayer was a fundamental activity of the apostle’s life (cf. 1:2ff; 2 Thess. 1:11; Rom. 1:10; Col. 1:3, 9) and he expected all believers to be devoted to prayer. Believers must regularly

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, 189.

² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 2:198.

pray for their own needs as well as the needs of others. We must continue steadfastly in prayer (Rom. 12:12).

These imperatives from the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the Scriptures teach us that regular, habitual prayer is a Christian duty. It is grievous sin of omission to neglect this important means of grace. Yet, tragically, American professing Christians are not known as great prayer warriors. Believers in the West are known for their programs, mega-churches, clever organizations, self-confidence and pragmatism. Perhaps this is due to the widespread influence of Arminianism and the popularity of the church growth movement. In any case, one thing is clear—the widespread declension, indifference, apostasy and worldliness in the churches are connected to a low view and feeble practice of prayer. “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (Jas. 4:2b-3). Oh, that God would give us hearts that seek Him in prayer!

As we contemplate this three-fold command, there are a number of things that are noteworthy. First, asking God for anything requires faith in Jesus Christ. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Our text obviously does not apply to the unregenerate. Only the man who has been humbled by the Holy Spirit, who sees his own complete unworthiness and need of Jesus, will reach out to God by faith. Only the man whose heart has been changed by the power of God recognizes that he needs daily supplies of grace. The humbled heart cries out to God and seeks help from above. Genuine faith looks away from itself to the throne of grace. It is this kind of heart that prays without ceasing because it always has a burning desire for God and His kingdom.

The secular humanist obviously does not “ask,” for his god is humanity. The Roman Catholic turns prayer into a meritorious exercise. For many, it is a mindless ritual and mumbling of written words without a true seeking of God. True prayer is not a stringing together of artful, beautiful expressions to impress or inspire others. It is the irrepressible cry of the child of God to His heavenly Father.

Faith embraces the God who is revealed in Scripture and thus believes that He has the power to give us what He has promised or what is according to His own revealed will. Jesus said, “Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them (Mk. 11:24; cf. Mt. 21:22). As James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord...” (Jas. 1:5-7).

Second, the seeking and knocking emphasizes persistence and perseverance in prayer. If we really want something from God, a passing, ill-considered request is not the way to go about it. We must seek God with the whole heart (cf. Jer. 29:13) and continually knock on heaven’s door with our petitions. This means that if we are praying for the salvation of a loved one or the healing of a friend, there is nothing wrong with praying every day, repeatedly, about the same issues.

We are reminded of the Syro-Phoenician woman who came to Jesus and pleaded for the deliverance of her demon-possessed daughter. The disciples asked Christ to get rid of her because she was crying out after them. Our Lord even spoke as if He were going to refuse her request. He said it was inappropriate “to take the children’s food and throw it to the little dogs” (Mt. 15:26). Instead of getting discouraged and walking away, she pressed her case with another argument that the little dogs should be allowed to eat the crumbs that fall from the table. The

Savior answered, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire” (Mt. 15:28; cf. Mk. 7:24-30). She kept asking, seeking and knocking until her request was granted. Note that it was her great faith that caused her to persevere in prayer. She knew that Jesus had the power to deliver her daughter. She also knew that He was kind, compassionate and merciful. Her faith reached out and clung to Christ and, thus, she persisted until her prayer was answered.

Another example of determined perseverance in prayer is that of blind Bartimaeus. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming near: “He began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (Mk. 10:47). The people around him did not encourage him to pray, but rather “warned him to be quiet” (v. 48). But the rebukes of men were not going to stop him from repeating his petition. Although he had never seen Jesus, he had heard all about Him and believed in His great power and compassion. He knew that the opinion of these bystanders must not be a hindrance in seeking the mercy of the Son of David. The ridicule of men did not hinder his faith. Instead, “he cried out all the more.” The result was that his persistence paid off. Christ called Him over, asked him to be more specific and then gave him his sight. “Go your way; your faith has made you well” (v. 52).

Are you half-hearted in your seeking of the Redeemer? Are you easily deterred, checked and discouraged when you draw near to God? Do you throw up your hands and give up easily when the door of heaven seems closed to you? If this is a problem for you, then you need to see Christ and your Father more clearly. You need to understand the power, love, kindness, compassion and mercy of God. You need to strengthen your faith with the teaching of God’s Word.

All of this often raises a question as to why God requires persistence and perseverance in prayer. The answers to this question are simple. (1) There is a need for this kind of prayer in the Christian life. The walk of a believer is a constant struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. Because of the sin that remains in us we must fervently, persistently battle against the flesh using all the biblical tools afforded to us. Because we are always in need of daily supplies of grace to move forward in godliness we must persevere in prayer. Our only stronghold of safety is to continually call upon God’s help so that we do not slide into sin and despair. Calvin notes, “By doing so we invoke the presence both of his providence, through which he watches over and guards our affairs, and of his power, through which he sustains us, weak as we are and well-nigh overcome, and of his goodness, through which he receives us, miserably burdened with sins, unto grace; and in short, it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us.”³ Ironically the more we grow in grace, the more sensitive that we become of our shortcomings and the heinousness of the sin that remains with us. Therefore, as we mature in Christ we see the need to pray more and not less.

(2) God likes to test our faith in order to increase it. Obviously, God is omniscient and knows everything that we need before we even ask. Jesus acknowledged this truth earlier in the sermon (e.g., Mt. 6:6-8). Also, we know that God loves to give gifts unto us. (This point will be considered in a moment.) Therefore, prevailing prayer does not mean that God is unwilling to give until we twist His arm and He finally gives in. It may seem that way because of the parables on persistence in prayer. But, although these stories emphasize the need for perseverance, they are not lessons on God’s nature and character. God is not like the wicked, uncaring, unjust judge of Luke 18:1-6.

God has us wrestle with Him in prayer until we are ready to receive; until our faith has been sharpened and sanctification furthered. With the Syro-Phoenician woman, Jesus drew out

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), [iii:xx:2] 2:851.

her faith and then praised it. The same is true of blind Bartimaeus. When our Lord asked him what he wanted, the Savior already knew. Indeed, it was obvious to everyone. But Bartimaeus' confession of faith was sweet to Christ and He declared the importance of his faith. When the Angel of the Lord wrestled with Jacob all night, there is a sense in which Jacob prevailed on God in prayer. However, didn't God really allow Jacob to prevail for his own benefit? "Even when Jacob 'prevailed on God,' what really happened is that God prevailed over him, bringing him to the point of surrender when he was able to receive the blessing which God had all the time been longing to give him."⁴

We must never view Jehovah as reluctant to answer our prayers, for the Bible explicitly teaches that God reached out to us, saved us and blessed us with all spiritual blessings before we were seeking Him (e.g., see Eph. 1:4-6; 2:1-9). In truth, He will "do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Yes, God is sanctifying us and developing our patience. Indeed, faith tells us not to give up or worry or get discouraged, but wait because God is faithful. "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD" (Ps. 27:14). Real faith endures and hopes, while a counterfeit faith crumbles and falls to the ground. Genuine faith understands God's ways and trusts Him, while a phony faith panics, murmurs and complains against God. What James says about trials can also apply to unanswered prayer: "My brethren count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (Jas. 1:2-3). Beloved, if you want God's special blessing, then you need to persevere in prayer. Christ has saved us and now He says, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. 81:10).

The Reason to Ask, Seek and Knock

The reason for persevering in prayer is stated in verse seven, immediately after each imperative. Then in verse eight, which gives the explanation of verse seven, the reasons are stated once again after every participle. "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Mt. 7:7-8). Persistence in prayer leads to results. We are not to cease praying for something because there is no immediate or apparent answer to our prayers. If we continue to pray, God will answer our prayers. It is God's revealed will that the secondary agency of fervent, persevering prayer be used to bring to pass things that He has already decreed and desires to bring to pass. Under the Old Covenant, coals from the altar were taken to burn the sweet incense in the censers causing the perfumed smoke to ascend to God. We need the Holy Spirit (who proceeds from Christ because of His redemptive work) to burn in our hearts so that our prayers will be a sweet smell unto God. God loves the prayers of His saints. The Lord is greatly pleased in devout and religious ascents; He delights in answering the requests of His dear children.

James, the half-brother of our Lord, teaches the same thing about fervent prayer in his epistle: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain on the land for three years and six months, and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit" (Jas. 5:17-18). James says that for success in prayer the person praying must be righteous. We should not expect God to answer our prayers when we are sinning with a high hand and committing

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, 186.

scandalous trespasses against Him. God will not listen to the prayers of a hypocrite. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination” (Pr. 21:27). “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Pr. 28:9). As Samuel said to Saul, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD?” (1 Sam.15:22). Our prayer life must flow out of a life of obedience toward God.

Also, for prayer to be effective it must be earnest, fervent prayer. There must be a continuing force and verve behind our prayers. This was the practice of the apostolic church: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplications” (Ac. 1:14). Fervent, persevering prayer requires labor. Because of our flesh, we have a tendency to be lazy and neglectful when it comes to prayer. This is something we must struggle against. Like Moses’ hands during the battle, we need to keep our attention and our love upward. “To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul” (Ps. 25:1). “A bird cannot stay up in the air without a continual flight and motion of the wings; neither can we persist in prayer without constant work and labour: our faith is so weak that we are hardly brought into God’s presence; and our love is so small, that we are hardly kept there: affections flag, and then our thoughts are scattered; weariness maketh way for wandering; first our hearts are gone, and then our minds, so that we have need of much labour and diligence; all acts of duty are drawn from us by an holy force.”⁵

The great encouragement to prayer is Jesus’ promise that God hears us and answers our petitions. As James says, “effective, fervent prayer...avails much.” Prayer is clearly one of our greatest and most rewarding duties. Prayer is the key that God has given us to unlock heaven. It is the chief means of grace whereby we obtain from God every blessing. Christ bids us to ask, seek and knock because we do not seek God’s face in vain. Because of the blood of Christ and our justification and adoption, our prayers are efficacious. Our heavenly Father is pleased to accept our petitions in His dear Son. To “avail much,” our prayers must not be mechanical or only spoken with one’s lips, but must flow from our hearts. And like Jacob we must cling to God saying, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” (Gen. 32:26). We, who can pray *in the name* of *Jesus*, have the greatest promise and the most effectual strength. May the Lord increase in us the faith that reaches out to God and calls down the blessings of heaven.

An Illustration Explaining Why God Answers Prayer

In verses 9 through 11 Jesus uses an analogy from human parenthood to demonstrate the reason why we can trust God to answer our prayers. This is the proof that supports His promise. It is another “how much more” (*a fortiori*) argument. If human parents who are evil know how to give good gifts to their children, then how much more will our heavenly Father (who is not evil at all but absolutely good) give good things to those who ask Him!

Our Lord begins with two examples of a son asking his father for food (Luke will add a third example, 11:12). If a son requests bread, a normal parent would never mock him by giving him a stone. A stone can resemble bread, yet it is worthless as food. If a child asks his father for a fish, that parent would never give him a serpent. The word “serpent” probably refers to an eel without scales. According to the law (Lev. 11:12), Jews could not eat eels because they were unclean. Once again, the gift given is useless. It makes a mockery of the request. Luke’s gospel adds a scorpion for an egg (11:12). A scorpion would not only be useless, but also would be harmful. Normal parents do not intentionally mock, disappoint or harm their children. The whole

⁵ Thomas Manton, *A Commentary on James* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1693] 1963), 464.

point of these examples is to get the audience to completely agree with what our Lord has said. Parental affection toward their children (even in a fallen world) is one of the strongest feelings of the human heart. For a parent to treat their own child's reasonable, necessary requests (bread and fish was the staple diet in the region of Galilee) with base deception and mockery would be monstrous. It would be unthinkable to any normal parent. Any man who acted this way would be considered an unfit parent and a disgrace to the human race. "The point is not that human parents are incapable of cruelty or neglect of their children, but that our inbuilt assumption of what parenting ought to be like is a valid pointer toward the greater parental concern of the heavenly Father."⁶

After these two examples where Jesus has already convinced his audience about human parents, He then summarizes the premise behind the examples and drives home His conclusion. "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 good things to those who ask Him!" (Mt. 7:11). There are a number of things to note about this statement.

First, our Lord presupposes the fall of Adam and the doctrine of original sin and says plainly that the human race is evil. All men and all parents are fallen, depraved and corrupt to the very core of their being. This solemn and striking statement was not made to His enemies or to convicts on death row, but to His friends and disciples. This is obviously a statement with a universal application. The modern secular humanistic notion that all people are basically good and that mankind if left alone can work out all its ethical, political, spiritual and socio-economic problems through reason and science is pure nonsense.

Note, however, that even though the parents are said to be evil, they are still capable of doing good. The fall does not mean that the image of God in the broad sense is destroyed. Man still has reasoning capabilities and a conscience that discriminates between good and evil. Men can still do activities that are *outwardly* good. They cannot, however, do deeds that are spiritually good or good in relation to God. Their actions do not flow from a true love of God and a seeking of His glory. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8). The pagan unbeliever hates God and lives in rebellion against him and therefore is "evil." But, because he is created in the image of God, he still has a natural affection for his children and thus seeks what he deems is best for their welfare.

Second, Christ sets forth His conclusion that if we can trust an evil earthly father to give good gifts to his children, then obviously we can also trust our good, merciful, loving heavenly Father to give good things to His children. In other words, the reason that we can rest assured that God will answer our prayers is that God is our Father through Jesus Christ and God has a certain character. In knowledge, wisdom, compassion, kindness, love and power our heavenly Father infinitely surpasses all earthly fathers. They are not only finite, but sinful, depraved and undependable. God's saving, electing love toward His children is infinitely greater than even the best of human love. It infinitely surpasses the love that a mother has for her only son. It is a love, compassion and mercy so great that it sent Jesus Christ to the cross to bear our sins in His own body. If evil parents respond with kindness to the cries of their children, what should we expect from Jehovah who has placed His dear children in the bosom of Jesus? Once we grasp this love and relationship established by Christ, then we can, with faith, endure every trial and storm that lies before us.

⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 281.

The implication of all this is that not only should we be persevering in prayer, but we should be fully assured that God will give us “good things.” He will answer our prayers in such a way that benefits us the most. If our prayers are not answered right away and we are suffering some affliction, we can trust that God is giving us what we need. We must avoid the sinful attitude of unbelief which thinks that God is out to get us; that even though we have asked for something good, God will give us something bad that will bring us harm. We must never allow such sinful thoughts to enter our minds.

But what do we say to professing Christians who argue that they have prayed and prayed and yet their circumstances in life seem even more difficult than before? In order to be faithful to this passage and the rest of the Scriptures, we must cling to these promises by faith. Many of God’s saints such as Moses, Job, David and Paul have gone through trials and have benefited greatly from them. “Your present lot is from the Lord, your circumstances are ordered by Him who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind.”⁷

Until we believe in the goodness of God and our adoption as sons in Jesus Christ, our prayers will not be prayers of faith and such prayers would be ineffectual. But now that we understand why our Lord commands us to persevere in prayer and why our prayers will be answered, we should be more ready and willing to go to God to supply all our needs. We have no excuse whatsoever not to pray fervently and frequently. To not pray as we ought is a serious sin that needs to be repented of immediately. It is the height of foolishness not to seek God in prayer when He has commanded us to do so and has promised to answer our prayers. We need to appreciate this privilege and make daily, set times of prayer a non-negotiable habit. We also should commune with God throughout the day and say little prayers as we walk, or drive, or sit at our desk. All of this is so simple and easy to understand that there is no excuse for us to neglect fervent, persistent prayer. Does your prayer life demonstrate that you believe in the goodness and love that God has for you? Are you so worldly that laziness and entertainments have cut into your prayer time? Are you so careless and unorganized that your prayer life is minimal and haphazard? Today, beloved, is the day to take this teaching seriously and repent. May God enable us to pray with a full confidence that we shall be heard and blessed!

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⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 313.