

Asking, Seeking, and Knocking

Matt. 7:7-11

Are you comfortable asking other people for help? It is not always easy to do that. I have to admit that asking for help does not come easy for me either. I recently shared with my Sunday School Class that years ago when I was the pastor of a church in OK that we were building a new sanctuary for our church. One of our men, Duane, took a week off from work to frame the interior of the building after we had erected the metal walls and roof. He taught me how to frame and showed me tricks that allow you to do the work without depending on anyone else for help. Working independently is good but there are times when we need the help of others and in order to get that help, we need to ask.

What is it that keeps us from asking for the help we need?

The answer may be just one word that is just expressed in many different circumstances. The word is pride. You may not ask your brother for help because you don't want your brother to know that you need help. You may not ask because you are afraid that your brother will deny you the help you are seeking and then you would have humbled yourself for nothing. You may not ask because even though you are confident that your brother would be glad to help you, you are holding something against him and so you don't want to owe him anything. You may not ask because you are unsure of yourself and you don't feel that you deserve any help. You may not ask for help because you have not yet admitted to yourself that you need help. Every excuse that we have named is rooted in pride.

Well, pastor, you have been talking about asking my brother for help but Jesus is talking about asking God for help. It's a lot easier to ask God for help than it is to ask a brother for help. This may be true and yet, Jesus later said to the very disciples who were listening to the sermon, "You have not because you ask not."

There are things we are comfortable asking for and then there are things that we are very reluctant to seek, sometimes even from God. For example, you

probably feel free to ask God to help if you have a financial need or if you are sick or going through some trauma. We know that God does care for us and that He is able to help us with these needs. We ask for help when we are helpless to help ourselves. Sometimes we wait until it is that desperate before we ask.

There are times though when we are reluctant to ask of God and at least one of these times is when we are afraid of what God might say. My brother-in-law, Robin Peets is

the father of Ben whom many of you have met and his wife Chrystal spoke at our Ladies' Tea one time. Robin is a very committed Christian man and he really has been consistently serious about seeking God's will in his life. So Robin told me about a friend of his, a member of their church who sold his home and moved to Oregon. When he was in the middle of this move, Robin, who I think was just curious about the process of God's leading in his friend's life, asked him about how he had become certain that God wanted him to move to Oregon. His friend answered that he had never asked God about the move. He had his reasons for moving and for him, this was enough. A move is a major change in a person's life and so it was an incredible and upsetting thing to Robin that his friend made such a decision without seeking direction from God.

Why do you think he moved without asking? Clearly, he wanted to move to Oregon but was he confident that God wanted him to do so? So one reason that we may not ask or seek or knock is that we may not want to risk it. The fear that God may complicate our plans and that He might send us on a course that we do not want to follow is based on assumptions that we tend to make about God. Some of these assumptions are groundless, others have merit.

We can sometimes believe that God is fundamentally against giving us what we want. He (according to this way of thinking) must always test our commitment by requiring that one thing of us that we are not willing to give. If you are willing to be a Sunday School teacher of children then God will insist that you teach adults. If you are willing to be a pastor then He will call you to be a missionary. If you tell God that you are willing to tithe, then He will soon ask you to give up the vacation that you had been planning for the last two years. God, according to this

kind of thinking is arbitrary and vengeful and He cannot be trusted when your life is on the line.

But this is not the God of the Bible. When the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds the heavenly hosts declared, "Peace on earth, goodwill to men." Jesus used the image of the Good Shepherd to say, "I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." James wrote, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." Jesus died on the cross for our salvation and so Paul argues, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life." The clear witness of the Scriptures is that God truly loves us and only wants what is best for our lives and that best that He wants is also the best that we can do or become. When you give your life to God you do not lose yourself, you find yourself.

Still, when it comes to seeking God's will, we have this conception of opposites. For, how can you prove that you are willing to do whatever God wants you to do unless you are willing to do what you do not want to do? So, if I want to move to Oregon, it is better not to ask God if I should do so since He will want to test my commitment by telling me not to go. I know deep within me that He will not let me go since He knows how badly I want to go. This line of thought ignores the loving-kindness of our creator. As our creator, God knows us even better than we can know ourselves. The desire of your heart is as much God's creation as the shape of your body and the uniqueness of your personality. God did not create the desires of your heart just so He could crush them. In general, you should be confident that God's will for you will be consistent with the gifts, interests, inclinations and loves that He has placed within you. We should also be clear that God wants to lift you and all of your potentials to a better and purer place than would be possible without His specific involvement and intervention in your life.

We have been watching the TV show *The Arrow* on Netflix. We are in the 4th season of the show and the Arrow's girlfriend has just broken up with him. She broke up with him because he excluded her from his decision making process.

When he encountered a crisis of some sort then he would figure out how he felt he should respond and then she would only find out later that he had done so. She wanted him to include her in every step of the process that she was only finding out about after the fact. In order to include her, he would have had to trust her to love him and to be loyal to him even in his greatest moments of weakness. He would have had to have believed that she believed in him, that she could handle having a flawed boyfriend rather than a perfect one. She longed for a relationship with the real Arrow, the intimacy of self-disclosed weakness and uncertainty. What he did not understand was what he was missing by excluding her from his closely held secrets. When he could have had a with her a unity of soul and spirit he had instead, a girlfriend who he was always trying to handle or manage. In the end, he lost her.

This is how we treat our heavenly Father and our Savior, the Lord Jesus, when we exclude God from the big decisions of our lives. He wants to be intimate with us. He wants to be on the inside of our heart and mind. He can be trusted. He only wants what is best. It is only when we try it that we can discover just how good and rich and rewarding God's way is. You may want to move to Oregon but when you talk to the Lord about it your conversation may not be about Oregon at all. It may be about what is actually in your heart, your deep desires and longings. You will discover a God who knows and understands, after all, He made you the way you are. He is able to show the way to a satisfaction and contentment with life that is better and deeper than anything that can be found in Oregon. After sharing with the Lord, you may still go to Oregon or you may not, either way you will know that what you have after sharing

with the Lord, after including Him in your process, after seeking the intimacy of unity of soul and spirit, will be much better than anything you could have had without doing so no matter where you end up living.

So hear again what Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to 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. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or, if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 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?