On Monday evening April 25th a tornado devastated our little community. When a tornado is about to knock down your door and blow out your windows we do not have any trouble being urgent and persistent in our prayers. This morning’s message speaks to that sense of urgency and persistence in our prayers.

There is nothing that reveals more about a believer than his or her prayer life. How that individual approaches God and what that individual is willing to ask for reveals how he or she views God. We frame our requests in accordance with what we know of the character of the one we are addressing. It is very similar to how a child will make a request from their father. The child with a kind, gentle and firm father, does not fear to ask anything, for deep down they have the assurance that the father has greater wisdom and experience, and therefore would not give them any-thing that would be harmful to them. The child with an extravagant but uncaring father will with arrogance lay down their demand knowing their every desire will be met. The child with the stingy, ill-tempered, abusive father will seldom dare to ask for anything, fearing yet another emotional explosion.

This is also true spiritually. I think sometimes our view of God can be influenced by the kind of earthly father we have had. We pray in harmony with the view of God we have. An individual that believes God is arbitrary, will be fearful and on guard. The individual who believes that God is vengeful will be fearful. But the individual who believes that God is gracious will come boldly.

The Sermon on the Mount has laid out the requirements of humility, purity and love expected of the followers of the Lord. And you will remember that in chapter six, verse twenty the Lord had said that the righteousness of his follower was to exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. In verse seven the Master tells his disciples how to go about being as persistent and urgent in prayer for spiritual growth as we are for our physical needs.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (9) Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? (11) 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!”

All three verbs in verse seven, “Ask, Seek, Knock,” are imperatives (commands). There are two basic kinds of imperatives in the New Testament. There is the **aorist imperative** which is a command to do a particular thing at one specific time; such as, “Go shut the door!” And there is the **present imperative** which is a command not only to **do something but to keep on doing it indefinitely**. All three verbs in verse seven, “Ask, Seek, Knock” are not only imperatives (commands) but they are present tense imperatives. We are told to ask and keep on asking, we are to seek and keep on seeking and we are to knock and keep on knocking.

There is also within this verse a suggested progression in prayer. **The very words; “ask, seek and knock,” seems to suggest an ever increasing intensity in prayer.**

1. **Asking.** There are some things that are the need is so clear that we mere must ask for them.
2. **Seeking.** Seeking is a deeper level of prayer than just asking. Sometimes we may doubt or be in darkness and we need to first seek God’s will before we know what to pray for. But God has made provision for us even in such times for we read in Romans 8:26-27 we read, “… the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (27) Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”
3. **Knocking.** The knocking here denotes seeking entrance, or desiring fellowship. Suggested is a persistence of a man standing at the door knocking. And when no one answers the door, continues to knock. Perhaps understanding that someone is home but no one has yet answered the door.

Within this command to pray I think we can see **five general principles about prayer.**

**First, God Does Not Promise to Answer Everyone’s Prayers.**

The there is a restriction to the promises given in these verses. These promises apply only to those who are really God’s children. Some would say, **“But isn’t God the Father of all humans?”** And the answer is, **“No he is not!”** And he is not obligated to answer the prayers of those who are not his children. I realize of course that is pretty narrow statement, in fact a former head of the Southern Baptist Convention once stirred up a big conflict over his statement that God is not obligated to answer the prayers of unbelievers. But he was right!
God is not the Father of all men, God is the Creator of all men, but that is not the same. God is Father only to those who are born again into the family of God.

God Does Not Promise to Answer Everyone’s Prayers....

Secondly, We Are Expected To Ask for the Things God Has Promised. “ask and it shall be given.”

This same principle is stated in the negative in James 4:2 “… you do not have because you do not ask.” Don’t those words describe the church as you know it today? The respected evangelist-preacher of the early nineteen hundreds Dr. R. A. Torrey said, “We do not live in a praying age. We live in an age of hustle and bustle, of man’s efforts and man’s determination, of man’s confidence in himself and his own power to achieve things, an age of human organization, and human machinery, and human push, and human scheming, and human achievement; which in the things of God means no real achievement at all.”[Reuben A. Torrey. “The Power of Prayer” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955) p. 16 as quoted by James Montgomery Boice. The Sermon on the Mount: An Exposition. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) p. 274]

We Are Expected To Ask for the Things God Has Promised ....

Third, God Hears And Answers Every Prayer. (7:8)
“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

In these words Jesus expresses that there are two certainties when we pray. One is that God hears every prayer. The other certainty is that God always answers. This verse says for “everyone who asks receives,” did I read that right? Yes, it says everyone receives!

Part of the problem is that we have the miscon-ception that the only possible answer to prayer is yes. There are other possibilities.

- When the request is wrong, He says “NO.”
  Sometimes what we want and what we ask for is not really in our best interest and our Heavenly Father who loves says, No. Sometime back country singer Garth Brooks wrote a song entitled “Thank God for Unanswered Prayer.” But Garth got it wrong; it was not unanswered prayer but prayer in which God said, “NO.” We really should be grateful that God does not give us everything we ask for.

- When the timing is wrong, He says, “Not Yet!”
  God can say, No or He can say, Not Yet. The problem with a lot of our prayers is that we want what we want and we want it right now! With God timing is more important than the passage of time. If there is a prayer that God has not answered for you, perhaps it is because it is not yet time. Remember from the experience of Mary and Martha (John 11) that God’s delays are not the same as denials.
“Every delay in prayer is a test of a man's righteousness. Will he give up? Will he become discouraged? Or will he persist in prayer? Prayer that ceases before the need is met is not prayer offered in faith. The evidence of the genuineness of faith is that it persists...” [J.D. Pentecost. “Design for Living: Lessons in Holiness from the Sermon of the Mount.” Kregel Publication.]

**God hears and answers every prayer...**

**Fourth, Sometimes God Gives Us What We Need And Not What We Ask For. (7:9-11)**

“Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? (11) 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!"

Even earthly fathers give good things to their children. We do not give a child a red-hot chili pepper just because they ask for it. Well, my father might have but he had an unusual sense of humor. Maybe you can now understand what is wrong with me. He once had me hold on to the spark plug of the lawn mower so “I could see if it was firing.” It was firing alright; it knocked the fire right out of me. Jesus is using exag-eration, to make a point. He is making a comparison, general speaking earthly fathers do not give things to our children that we know will really harm them.

If your child asks you for a snake will you give it to them? **No!** What if they beg and plead? The answer is still **NO!** What if they say, “I can’t live without a snake?” You still say, **NO!** Children often ask for foolish things which any parent in their right mind withholds. And if this true of earthly fathers how much more true it must be of our heavenly father.

John Stott puts it this way, “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.” [John Stott. “Essential Living: The Sermon on the Mount.” (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988) p. 189]

Someone has written “I asked for strength that I might achieve; he made me weak that I might obey. I asked for health that I might do great things: he gave grace that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy; he did not give them so that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness that I might feel a need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; I was given life, that I might enjoy all things. I received very few of the things I asked for; but I received the things I had hoped for.” [Haddon W. Robinson. “The Solid Rock Construction Company.” (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1989) pp. 106-107]

**Sometimes God Gives Us What We Need and Not What We Ask for...**

**Fifth, No Prayer Is Ever Wasted.**
The underlying principle behind the significance of persistent prayer has to be the truth that no prayer is ever wasted effort.

I want to close with an illustration from the life of Howard Hendricks, beloved professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Hendricks writes, “The phone rang and I greeted a young pastor friend from Arlington, Virginia. “What are you doing?” he asked. “Study-ing,” I replied. “Nothing special.” “Are you sitting down?” “Yes, why?” “Your father just trusted Christ this evening.” “He what? You’ve got to be kidding!” I blurted out. Such an inappropriate response grew out of long detours in our father-son journey. Ever since I received Christ as a boy my concern has been for the salvation of my family and loved ones. On repeated occasions I had broached the subject of the gospel with dad, but his response was less than excited.

My father has always been a very important person to me. Not that I approved of everything he said or did or that I imitated him consciously in any way. We weren’t really close friends, either. But he was impor-tant in my life because of the indirect impact he made upon me.

Dad was a military man. He had seen action around the world. During the periods when he was embroiled in battle, I would become very sensitive to his spiritual need. I and my family prayed for him, but at times I’m afraid my faith sputtered. His response was always the same: Son, don’t worry about me. I’ll work it out with God (as if God could be manipulated like a Pentagon official).

God brought a man into my life, a man with a passion for men. His name was Butch Hardman. One day before we knew each other Butch was boarding a plane in Detroit when a friend handed him a cassette tape. “Ever hear Hendricks? Here’s a tape you should listen to.” On that tape I related my father’s spiritual need. Butch listened and something about the anecdote reminded him of his own father with whom he had shared Christ shortly before he died. He began to pray for this unknown man, George Hendricks.

Some months later Butch attended a pastors’ conference in Philadelphia where I was the speaker. He shook my hand afterward. That was the only time our paths crossed before a remarkable incident in Arlington.

Butch was driving the church bus down the street, having discharged all his passengers. He saw a man standing on the corner who reminded him uncan-nily of Howard Hendricks. Could it possibly be...? He backed up the bus, stopped, got off, and went over to the man. “Are you by any chance Howard Hendricks’ father?” It is easy to imagine the startled response. “Er-ah (I can envision my father’s critical once-over with his steely blue eyes) yeah—you a student of my son?” “No, I’m not, but he sure has helped me. Got time for a cup of coffee?”
That encounter began a friendship, skillfully engineered by the Spirit of God. Butch undoubtedly sensed dad’s hesitancy when he discovered he had met a preacher. For a long time Butch did not invite him to attend his church. He simply suggested that dad drop by the office for coffee. Patiently he endured dad’s cigars and his endless repertoire of war stories. Before long he also learned that dad had been diagnosed as having a terminal throat cancer. Months later Butch was at his bedside. “Mr. Hendricks, I’ll be leaving shortly for a Holy Land trip. Instead of my listening to you tonight, would you let me tell you a story?”

Butch had earned his hearing and he began simply to relate the interview of Jesus Christ with Nicodemus as recorded by the Apostle John. At the conclusion dad accepted Butch’s invitation to receive Jesus Christ as his own personal Savior. Then dad got up out of bed, stood, and saluted with a smile. “Now I’m under a new Commander-in-Chief!” That night Butch called Dallas.

The last time I saw dad alive I could not believe he was the same man I had known. His frame was wasted, but his spirit was more virile than I had ever known.

In accordance with dad’s specific provision in his will, Butch Hardman conducted the crisp military funeral in Arlington cemetery where the gospel of Jesus Christ was presented to the small group of family and military attendants. As the guns saluted their final farewell, I knew God had vindicated forty-two years of prayer. [Howard & Jeanne Hendricks. FootPrints. (Multnomah Press, 1981) pp. 16-19 - www.bible.org/illus/p-g/p-q-83.htm

No Prayer Is Ever Wasted …

What are the principles of Prayer revealed in this command?

1. **God Does Not Promise to Answer Everyone’s Prayers.**
2. **We Are Expected To Ask for the Things God Has Promised**
3. **God hears and answers every prayer.**
4. **Sometimes God Gives Us What We Need and Not What We Ask for.**
5. **No Prayer Is Ever Wasted**
“Ask, Seek, Knock” – suggested a progression in prayer – an ever increasing intensity in prayer.

Five general principles about prayer.

First, God Does Not Promise to Answer _________ Prayers.
“But isn’t God the Father of all humans?” And the answer is, “No he is not!”

Secondly, We Are Expected To Ask for the Things God Has ___________. (James 4:2)

Third, God Hears And Answers ___________ Prayer. (7:8)
- When the request is wrong, He says “_____.”
- When the timing is wrong, He says, “Not _____!”

Fourth, Sometimes God Gives Us What We _______ And Not What We ______ For. (7:9-11)

Fifth, No Prayer Is Ever _______________.

“Ask, ...Seek ...And Knock”
Matt 7:7-11