Matthew 7:7-11

Praying persistently to the Father

Sermon outline:

# The call to prayer (7-8)

# The confidence in prayer (9-11)

# Jesus and prayer

Matthew 7:7-11

Praying persistently to the Father

We can have confidence in praying persistently because of who God is and what Jesus has done.

# Introduction

I have a friend I’ve been praying for this year. He’s one of the boy’s I got to lead through youth group at my last church. He’s 16 and he’s been diagnosed with cancer this year. Recent scans showed that 5 more tumours have appeared in him and at the moment he is undergoing his eighth round of chemo. Although we haven’t lost hope things haven’t been looking good for him.

I’m not sure If you’ve ever prayed for someone in such a situation but it raises some questions about prayer doesn’t it.

Does prayer work? Those prayers we have prayed in desperate times, are they answered? Is prayer really an effective use of our time? Can we have any confidence in our prayers?

In this passage Jesus teaches us to pray **persistently** and with **confidence** because of who God is and what he has done for us. Firstly, in this passage we see Jesus teach us to be persistent in prayer. Follow along with me as I read chapter 7 verses 7-8.

# The call to prayer (7-8) (Jesus has taught us to pray)

READ 7-8

Jesus is using a literary technique here. He’s using three prayer related words repetitively, (ask, seek and knock) in an attempt to call us to pray, but not only to pray but also also to pray persistently.

(John Chapmen; read, re-read and read again illustration) When I was being taught how to wite talks and bible studies I read a book by John chapmen and his first step in preparing a sermon was to read the passage, re-read it and read it again. He wasn’t saying – once you’ve read the passage three times you’ll be god to go, he was emphasising that we should be immersed in reading the passage, that we should be persistent in our reading of it over and over again.

And it’s similar in this passage.

Jesus call to, ask, seek and knock is another way of saying: ‘pray, keep praying and pray some more’. He’s calling us to be persistent in prayer.

And the reason why he calls us to do this is answered with the matching repetition of promises Each call to prayer is coupled with a promise for it to be answered.

If we ask, we will receive;

if we seek we will find and;

if we knock the door will be opened to us.

What a beautiful promise to hold onto. To know that every time we bring a request to God he will answer it.

<SLOW DOWN HERE>

But if we’re honest with ourselves it doesn’t always feel this way does it.

And often we lose motivation in prayer because we feel as though our prayers aren’t being answered or in some moments of our lives we feel as though they may not be heard at all.

<Tell about praying to God about Nathan>

Earlier I mentioned my friend I’ve been praying for and I’d be lying if I said there haven’t been moments where I doubt the effectiveness of prayer. There are moments when I wonder if God is listening, particularly when I hear that new results are negative. And I somewhat lose the motivation to pray in these moments.

But this passage has been a refreshing reminder that these doubts can be rivalled, and not only rivalled but overcome. Jesus goes on to teach that we can have confidence in our prayers not because of who we are or how we pray or how often we pray but rather because of who we are praying to and what Jesus has done.

Follow along as I read verses 9 to 11.

# The confidence in prayer (9-11) (God is our heavenly father)

READ 9-11

In this passage Jesus uses a human relationship as an example in order to show us the far surpassing greatness of the human to God relationship. He’s showing us that we can have confidence in our prayers because God is a perfect, good and heavenly father.

We can see the logic in it can’t we.

If we human fathers although we are evil can still give good gifts to our children, then how much more then will God. The perfect Lord of all who is free from all evil intentions and knows all things. How much more will He be able to, and even desire to give good gifts to his children.

I want to pause here for a second and note something. When Jesus teaches this he takes into consideration the fact that fathers are evil. He’s not saying that we fathers are always out to seek how to harm others or that fathers are somehow more evil than other human beings.

He’s saying that we have a tendency like all people to misuse God’s good design for the world, and that impacts how we father as well. And it’s a sad reality that some people have had fathers who have caused more hurt than others.

For some of us father’s day is a hard day to celebrate for many reasons, maybe it’s the loss of a father that today serves as a reminder of, or maybe it’s the memory of a father who didn’t behave like a father ought to have behaved and the memories that are sparked by today aren’t helpful.

No matter what father’s day is like for us, today’s teaching should be a comfort to all of us.

<Start increasing speed and excitement in tone>

No matter who you have or have had as a father, no matter how good or bad they are or were, there is a heavenly father whom we can be adopted by through Jesus.

And this father, God, is perfect, good and loving. He knows how to give good gifts to his children unlike any earthly father ever could.

And it’s this confidence in God as our heavenly father that spurs us onto following Jesus teaching to pray persistently. For even though we may not know why God answers prayers the way he does. We know enough about God to know that he loves us as a perfect father and it’s that which gives us confidence in our prayers.

When I was eleven my family moved house and growing up without much spicy food I had never eaten a raw chili and so when we moved house and the garden had a chili plant I asked my dad what they tasted like.

Now my dad was craftier than all the other dads and he decided it would be a good idea to tell me that chili’s are a type of capsicum, just smaller and sweeter. The way he smirked as he said this made me question whether to eat it or not and so I kept asking questions about it but he avoided answering my questions and eventually I had to decide whether I would trust his word even though I had a lot of unanswered questions.

And I did, I ate the chili and then spent the next few hours drinking water and milk through watery eyes and a runny nose while he watched on laughing.

I love my dad and he’s a great dad and as you have probably guessed he’s also a great practical joker. But God isn’t like human fathers. He is unable to lie, he knows everything and he’s completely good. Which means trusting him is nothing like trusting my father’s teaching on chili.

We can trust God despite still having questions and know that it will never backfire on us like it did with me with my dad that day. And this is because God is a trustworthy, good and perfect father.

# Jesus and prayer (Jesus has enabled us to pray to God as our father)

But Jesus doesn’t only teach us that we should pray to God as our father, he is also the one that enables us to call God our heavenly father.

Before Jesus the relationship humanity had with God could never be a father-child relationship. This is because humanity rejects God and his perfect rule over the world and God can’t leave that unpunished forever.

But God in his love decided to send Jesus. And In this passage Jesus is teaching on a mountainside which was one of many things he did as he slowly proceeded towards Jerusalem. The city in which he would be crucified in before rising again from death three days later. All of which he has done so that we, the guilty can be pardoned for our rebellion and can now call upon God as our heavenly father.

It’s in his death and resurrection that Jesus turns humanity from being enemies of God and into God’s children. That’s why the bible says:

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ Died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

And this raises the largest question of all**, If Jesus has opened the way for us to pray to God as our father, What about our unanswered prayers and the silence of God?**

This is possibly the cause of the most discouragement for our prayer lives.

Jesus taught in today’s passage that all our prayers are answered. But we don’t know how God answers them and often God answers prayers in a way we don’t expect.

And this isn’t something Jesus is unaware of, take for example his own prayer in the garden of gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. Jesus prays to God "father if it is your will take this cup from me". And on the cross he cries out “ My God My God why have you forsaken me"? In both of these moments he would have felt that his prayers were not answered.

But God in his wisdom had planned that Jesus needed to go to the cross.

For without Christ's death on the cross we would have no relationship with our heavenly Father.

In Jesus death we see God answering prayers that in the moment would have been seemingly ‘unanswered’ and It’s because of Jesus death that we can now pray with confidence.

Jesus prayer was not answered so that all our prayers can be answered

Jesus prayer was met with silence so that our prayers can be heard

Jesus was the first to teach people to pray to God as our heavenly father because he was on his way to Jerusalem in order to enable us to do that.

Praying to God as our Father was a radically new teaching. Jesus reinvented prayer so to speak, by enabling us to have a new relationship with God as his children. And what a wonderful gift it is to pray to our Father who doesn’t withhold good from us.

# Conclusion:

So why do we as Christians have confidence in our prayers? Why do we pray persistently even in the face of seeming silence from God ? It’s because Jesus has opened the way for us to pray to God as our heavenly father who always answers and who won’t hesitate to give us good gifts.

And so it’s only fitting that I end with prayer, would you please join me?

Heavenly father we want to praise you as the God who created the whole universe and yet in your love you consider us. Thank you that ithrough Jesus you opened up the way for us to come to you as our heavenly Father with no burden of sin’s punishment weighing over us. Help us lord to be reminded of what you have done for us and may you remind us of who you are and what you have done in order to spur us on towards persistent prayer so as to make use of the incredible gift of prayer you have given us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.