

The Importance of Seeking

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Date: 15 May 2016

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[0 : 0 0] the sort of what you call the great equalizer, where Jesus says, verse 33, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. I'm going to be pointing out that seeking is not limited to prayer, and everything else that the Bible has to say about seeking God is connected to prayer.

Matthew 7, 7 and 8 then says, 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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. If you'd like to turn to Hebrews chapter 11, which comes before the book of James, Hebrews 11 is probably one of the more famous, Hebrews 11, one of the more famous chapters of Hebrews. Hebrews 11 verse 6 says this, And without faith, it is impossible to please him, that's of course God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him. Okay, he rewards those who seek him. Well, it's these considerations that we're going to be taking a look at this evening, the importance of seeking, and its relevance to seeking God in prayer, as Jesus says in Matthew 7, 7 and 8. But before we come back to the Word, well, particular message on prayer, I asked myself the question, so I want to begin by asking you the question, is that we've heard several messages on prayer already, but how many messages on prayer does it take for us to pray more?

I asked myself the question, is actually hearing more message on prayer, even the answer to praying more, well, God's Word is powerful and effective. But only you are going to be able to answer the question honestly tonight. Are you praying more as a result of hearing more about the importance of prayer? It's normally at this point that you get to experience the disconnect between affirming what is true and practicing what is true. Okay, there's a, there's, the two are to be connected.

I can affirm what is true, but it doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to practice what is true. I'm not a denier of the truth, but neither am I a practicer of the truth. Well, this evening, we actually come to a part of prayer, which I think is probably the hardest part of all, and that is actually seeking, seeking, just seeking. Now, seeking isn't actually limited to prayer, as we see at the end of Matthew 6, that we are to seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, that we're to seek first God. God is to be our absolute priority in all of our seeking.

The thing is, is when you're doing that, it affects your praying life, and so the seeking that we do at the end of Matthew 6, in seeking first the kingdom, affects actually what we begin to pray for.

[3 : 3 9] So, whenever we take the subject of seeking, we have to take all the passages, at least in context, that has to do with seeking God and drawing near to God, and then we have to understand them what they mean in the light of seeking God in terms of praying to God. Because Jesus places seeking here after asking, I'm not quite so sure if he does that because that's the order, or if he does that because that is, he's just laying out another imperative, another thing to do. In other words, you know, if you were searching the cupboards at home, well, you probably wouldn't do it, but your children, they're searching the cupboards at home, and then they see something that they want, it's normally at that point they ask for it. So, that the seeking precedes the asking, which precedes the no, you can't, or yes, you can, whatever it may be. So, I'm not quite so sure that Jesus is put seeking after asking because he's making a specific point. He might be, and I might actually be missing it. Nevertheless, the truth remains that seeking is a part of praying, or it is a part that actually precedes praying, or the very beginning of how we pray. Seek, Jesus says, and you will find. Seek, and you will find.

The question is, find what? Seek, and you will find what? Because if you lost your glasses, and you go looking for them, you're seeking, you know what you're looking for. And, you know, one of my favorite statements, which makes absolutely no sense whatsoever, is when people say to you,

they'll be in the last place you look. Well, of course they're going to be in the last place you look, because you don't carry on looking for something after you've found it. But how many people say, well, they'll be in the last place you look? Of course they will. So, I understand seeking on that level. I understand how to seek for something when I'm looking for something in particular, when something is lost. But Jesus says here, ask. Well, ask. I get that, because I've already, asking starts with me, what I want. But seeking. What are we going to find when we seek? What does Jesus want us to think about when we seek? I think it's God. God just for God. God wants us to seek him, just because he wants us to seek him. And I think this is spelled out in other passages throughout Scripture. The amount of times God calls his people to humble themselves and to seek him. In Hebrews, those who diligently seek him, God will draw near to. So, even though it doesn't say here, God in that context, that what we're seeking for, I think if you pull together all the other passages that speak of seeking, that the end of the seeking, if you ask the question, what are we seeking for?

The answer is God. The question here, however, is what does it mean to seek first? I think seeking is important for a number of reasons. One, because it addresses the priority.

Prayers that begin fast and end fast because you want to eat your tea aren't really prayers that are really engaging with God. They're something that you do so that you can get on with what you want to do really quickly.

[7:21] So, what is the priority to seeking? What does it mean also to seek God with our whole heart? Again, where if God says, I want you to seek me, and elsewhere he says, if you're going to seek me, you have to do it with your whole heart. He doesn't say it here, but the thing is, it doesn't mean anything less than what he said previously. So, just because it doesn't include here the priority, or it doesn't include here, it doesn't state specifically, do it with your whole heart, it clearly does mean that because it doesn't mean less than that because God tells us it elsewhere.

So, to seek God with your whole heart is really questioning your desire, your intent. Then, what about the time involved? How much time does it take God, does it take you to ask God for something? Well, it doesn't take me very long, but how much time does it take for you to seek God? To actually seek God. And I'm going to point out to you that it's not quite, and the question isn't quite as easy to answer as you might think it be. The reason being is because of this, that Jesus promised us that he would be with us till the end of the age. We looked at that this morning, didn't we? The question is, however, that in Hebrews, God says that he will draw near to those who seek him. So, you've got two issues here. The one issue is that God's always with us.

The second issue is that God is not always near to us, because God will draw near to us of those who seek him. So, the scripture, especially the New Testament, is clearly pointing out a picture that while it is true that we are always in the presence of God, it is also true that you can have a particular special presence of God in the sense that he draws near only through seeking him.

So, this seeking part has a very important role in our praying life, but we're going to begin with priority. The priority ends in chapter 6 with, seek ye first the kingdom of God. In other words, that when you put God first, and you put everything else first, and you keep that in the forefront of your mind, it affects every other decision you make. It will affect where you live. It will affect what you spend your money on. It will even affect, if you think it through, what you will do for a job, and what you won't do for a job. That one consideration alone, to seek ye first the kingdom of God, affects everything else in your life. It is the one decision that affects every other decision that comes after it. It cannot help but do that. Okay, we are all a product, to a certain extent, to our own decisions. And so, if we're truly seeking the kingdom of God, and we're truly seeking his righteousness, it's going to roll over to what we pray for. Suddenly, we're not praying for the things that we were before, because now we've got our priorities straight. Suddenly, we are praying for different things that we weren't before, and we're actually beginning to see the difference that it makes in the life of the church, and in the life of the community that we're in. In other words, to seek first God, it is to be so totally invested in God. You're not actually worried about these other things. You're not worried about what you're going to wear, because you know God's going to provide. You're not worried about where you're going to live, because you know God's going to provide. You're not going to be worried about any of these things, because God says, by seeking him first, you do what you're meant to do, and I'll do what I promise to do. The trouble is, however, we get these two the wrong way around, so we end up asking more, seeking less, because we're worried about not having the things that we need. But the question is this, that when, or rather, the reality is this, that when you

truly seek first the kingdom of God, it changes what you buy.

[11 : 14] It changes where you live. It changes what you do. It literally has an impact on every other part of your life. In other words, it puts everything else into its proper place. The issue here is not whether or not a person is seeking first the kingdom of God, it's whether or not they're seeking first the kingdom of God. We could all be seeking the kingdom of God, we could be praying, we could all be doing this. Rather, the question that we're raising is its priority. Where does it come?

You know, where does it come? In the list of the things you've actually got to do tomorrow. Now, I don't think that you need to take time out to purposely seek. I think it's an ongoing thing, that seeking first the kingdom of God sort of permeates everything else you do in your Christian life. I think that's the way that it works. When Jesus instructs his disciples to pray, he, of course, he tells them to ask, but then he tells them to seek and to knock. And I think we can tell the difference immediately between asking and seeking. Asking is when you're coming to God and you have something on mind that you want, and you say to God, this is what I would like. But when you're seeking God, you're not asking for anything. You're just seeking God for God. And so there's a big difference between asking and seeking. They are not the same things, as though Jesus said, ask, seek, and knock, as though he's saying the same things in different ways to get you to pray. No. Seeking is not asking.

You're not after anything from God other than God himself. You're not seeking something from God, but rather you are seeking God. Imagine for a minute that you really believe that every good gift comes from God above, that every wonderful gift comes from God, that you recognize you have what you have in your life as a direct result of God's wonderful grace, that you don't just affirm it, but you really believe it. You know, you wake up and you just, you can't be consumed with anything else other than the reality that God has given you what he has given you. And God's grace and his strength will get you through each day if it's, if it's a struggle and even the, the, the blessings that they're all from God. Now imagine that God would say, right now I want you to ask, as he says, Jesus says, ask of me and I will give to you. And you ask of everything and you can, you can get exactly what you want. So just imagine for a moment, have you got your list? Have you got your list of what you'd want? Now ask yourself this question, and where is God on that list? So you begin to realize it's so very, very easy to fill your list up with a whole number of other things and God, you're assuming, well, God must be there. You know, do you want a heaven without pain? Do you want a heaven with total security? Do you want a heaven full of blessing? Do you want a heaven full of a place with all your friends and all your family and having a wonderful time of fellowship? But would you still want all of that if God were not there? The issue to seeking is raising the issue of priority. Does God hold his rightful place in your praying life? That's the issue there. The temptation, of course, as Jesus points out, is to actually seek something from God rather than God. In fact, in Luke 15, how is sin described in Luke 15? Well, it's described firstly in the younger brother who decides to take everything from the father that's his, but he doesn't want the father, right? And he goes off and he spends it and he lives a reckless life. But on the way down the road, he's thinking, you know, everything's okay. Everything's going fine. You know, everything goes fine when you've got money in your pocket. You know, it's like falling off a skyscraper and get to the 67th floor and thinking, oh, I'm all right so far, right? That's the type of thinking that the younger brother was caught up in. Got money in my pocket, it's all right so far. But the reality was he wanted what the father had, but he didn't want him, okay? Asking, not seeking, not wanting. But the elder brother was doing exactly the same thing. You'll remember Jesus in the parable, the father goes out and he says, all these years I've served you and you've given me nothing. All right. That's why you've been good because you wanted something. So both sons, both sons want what the father has, but without the father. Okay. That's the motivation behind sin. We find it much, that's why we find it much easier to ask than we actually do to seek. This is rolled over again in the praying life of the Pharisee and the tax collector. You'll remember that the Pharisee goes to God and he thanks God. I want to thank you for this. I want to thank you for that. I want to thank you that I'm a good person. [16 : 46] His faith is based on the fact that he can thank God rather than who God is. And God says, which one goes home righteous? Which one goes home right with God? Well, it's not the Pharisee, but it's the tax collector. Why? Because he understood his true position. He was only seeking God, but the Pharisee was only given thanks for what he had received from God. In other words, his prayer was caught up in everything that he had, not focusing on God himself. Again, the issue is one of priority. Are we seeking God or are we only seeking things from God? The

temptation is to believe that if we're seeking something from God, we therefore must be seeking God? It's just not true. It's just not true.

Another point then is we must address the issue of God's presence. And this is the question I have for us this evening. Is the presence of the Lord a continual experience for you? And what I mean by that is, is on a daily basis, are you aware of the Lord's presence with you? Or is it fair to say that you have been aware of the Lord's presence with you at particular times rather than continually? And if that's the case, this is the next question. Why? Why is the Lord's presence intermittent like that?

I want to suggest to you that it's the reason why it might be intermittent is not because God isn't turning up in his presence on one occasion rather than the other because you need it more, though that could be true. I think one of the realities is has to do with our seeking.

God draws near to those who draw near to him. Okay? God draws near to those who draw near to him. And what that means is, is that while it is true that God is forever present with his believers, there is this particular form of God's presence that we can experience only through seeking.

And what that means is this, that you can be a believer and you can be turning up at church for the last 20 years and be in the presence of God, generally speaking, but never experience the close encounter with God that only comes through seeking. Does that make sense? There is a particular form of God's presence called God drawing near to us that only arise at the end or through our seeking.

[19 : 29] And so if you're not seeking God, if you're not drawing close to God, then the flip side is God doesn't do that either. So to state the absolute obvious, to point out the obvious, God's presence is always with us, but God's presence is not always with us in this particular way unless we seek God as God has called us to seek him. Which means that a person can go through their whole Christian life even without ever really knowing the close encounter with God. God really drawing close to them because they don't spend the time seeking him as they have been instructed. God also says, Hebrews 11 verse 6, which we read, that God particularly rewards those who seek him. God will reward you for seeking him. It's a bit like

Jesus says in Matthew where he says, go take yourself off into a quiet room and what God sees in secret, he will reward you. Okay, don't try and aim for your reward like the Pharisees who pray on street corners and everyone goes, wow, look at them praying. I mean, we're not in that culture today, so it would never ever work. But Jesus, both in Matthew and there in Hebrews, clearly points out that the way to have this particular experience with God, of God drawing near, can only ever happen through drawing near to him, through seeking him. I have one more thing obviously to address on this issue and that is how much time does it take? In other words, in a good way, how stubborn are you?

Are you willing to sit there praying and seeking God and not move until God turns up?

You see, the issue of time addresses the point of, well, if I get up after 30 minutes, what I'm saying is, is something should have happened by now. Right? If I get up after two minutes, I'm saying the same thing. But if I get up after an hour, I'm going to enjoy my hour in prayer, though it's difficult, you read your Bible and you pray. But at the end of it, I can guarantee that God's presence will be there in a different way than any other hour of the day. But God has promised to show up. God has promised to reward. God has promised to particularly draw near with his presence.

But how much time are you willing to devote to that? How biblically stubborn are you not to move until you know that there is a tangible change and difference where you know that God has rewarded you?

[22 : 32] Because if you don't know that God has rewarded you, you can't praise God for it. So God has to make it abundantly clear that he has rewarded you because that's the only way you can give thanks for it. If God rewards you and you don't know it, you're never going to give glory or thanks to him. So when it talks about God drawing near and being close to us, we must know what that is like from everything else so that we can bring glory to God. But how stubborn are you?

Sangster once said that the most blessed times he had in prayer, and he was in London, bombs were dropping during the Second World War, he was a Methodist minister, and his, you know, church couldn't function as it normally would. And at the end of, you know, days of, you know, bombs dropping and worry and just, he said that his greatest times in prayer that he had before God was not when he prayed when he wanted to, but when he decided to get down on his knees in praise at the point when he didn't want to. I just want to go to bed, I just want to, I've had enough.

And he said that the greatest blessings of prayer that he ever had was seeking God first and spending that time, and God rewarded him in it. Well, as we conclude, a final consideration in our conclusion.

We need to address the question of our whole heart, but we also need to address the issue of prayer being the great equalizer. In a world where people have different needs, this is addressed by money in the world, that you can address most of your needs in the world, most of your wants with money. And so money, for a lot of people, is the great equalizer.

If I don't have something and I want to balance out my life, I want, you know, I'll just pay for it, I'll just go and get it. The trouble is, is not everybody can be in that situation.

You know, you're, you're, you're, you're finding it difficult to make ends meet, your mortgage payment is coming up, and then suddenly for some reason, um, your council tax or whatever, or there's an insurance bill come through, and you think, where did that come from? Well, your, well, your car's gone wrong, something that even though you might have planned for, it's still more expensive than what you've actually got. Now, for a person who's got a lot of money, they can equalize out the situation, they can smooth out the bumps simply by paying for it. What Jesus says here, in terms of seeking first the kingdom of God, and of course, praying, is that prayer does exactly the same thing.

[25 : 17] Jesus says, don't worry about what you'll wear, pray. Seek first the kingdom of God. Jesus says, don't worry about where you'll live. In other words, some people are so worried about the basics of what they're going to eat, where they're going to live, what they're going to wear, that it sort of debilitates their relationship with God. They can't move any forward, and so what Jesus does by putting prayer in the context of seeking first the kingdom of God, or it comes out of that, is by showing us that prayer is the great equalizer. We can go to God and ask God to smooth out the bumps. It doesn't mean that we automatically become rich. It doesn't matter, mean that we automatically get exactly what we need, but it does mean that God will always get us through, always get us through. I don't want to tell a story at this point because, as I said, I pointed out the dangers of stories, that what is true for one person in their testimony before God is not true of another, and so the trouble is when you tell a story, you end up thinking, well, God could do that for me as well. He could, but he also might not. So prayer is a great equalizer. Prayer deals with the basics of life when you have need. God smooths out the bumps when you seek God first and his kingdom, and then you come to him in prayer. It levels the situation that you're in. God addresses the needs of his people when his people put him first. The trouble is, however, is that some Christians really do believe that they can't do any more for God or can't begin to do anything more for God unless they have something turn up in their life. They actually believe they need something else before they can do anything moving forward, and so they end up in this catch-22 situation. Even though Jesus has said, seek me first, they're thinking, I'm too scared to. I just can't do this, and so they ask and ask, and they're asking goes something like this. Lord, if I have this, it'll be different. Then I can.

Jesus won't take any notice of something like that because it flies in the face of the very thing that he has said. You don't need anything more. You just need God, and so the issue comes back to the issue of priority. Okay, things cannot do for you what God can. Okay, things cannot do for you what God can.

So, we are to seek God with our whole heart. Jeremiah 29, 13, which says, you will seek me and find me when you seek me with your whole heart. Seek me with your whole heart. And you know, listen, I don't need to point this out to you. You know whether or not you're really doing that. You don't need any special revelational conviction about that. You know whether or not you're truly seeking God with your whole heart or not. But above all, and with this we'll finish, seeking God is connected to praying God because God answers the prayer with himself. Seeking God means that we're not asking for anything from God other than himself through seeking. So, as we seek God, God answers our seeking by turning up, by drawing near, by rewarding those who diligently seek him. And so, there is this particular form of closeness of the presence of the Lord in your life that you can only ever arrive at through seeking him. And so, this raises one final question. If that's true, how close is your relationship with the Lord? As we learned from the psalmist last week, the Lord meets the desires of our heart. The psalmist, remember, the Lord meets the desires of our heart, not by giving us something else, but by giving us himself. And the issue then is whether or not we are satisfied with God. Amen.

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