

TALKING CONFIDENTLY TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Good morning! Last week, I talked about how to conquer worrying by switching your attention from your worries to God. I said that the way you do that is by prayer and fasting. And I shared with you how to have a more effective prayer life using the five fingers of your hands and then how to fast in such a way that you experience a breakthrough.

Then I said that a breakthrough is a sudden, dramatic, and important discovery or development. In other words, it is something that is miraculous. So, a "breakthrough" is when God does a miracle, when he miraculously solves an unsolvable problem in your life that you have no control over.

Now, God did not bring you here to Fil-Am Church during this particular season for no reason. He didn't bring you here to watch everybody else have their prayer answered. God brought you here because he wants to answer your prayer. God wants to do a breakthrough in your life. If he didn't want to do a breakthrough in your life, believe me, you wouldn't be here, but God wants to answer your prayer. He wants to have a breakthrough in your life.

Now, when you look at the life of Jesus, he chose 12 men to be his interns or disciples or followers, and they followed him for three and a half years. They saw Jesus do all kinds of amazing things. He healed people. He calmed storms. He fed the 5,000 with a single lunch. He did all kinds of miracles, all kinds of healings. He was an amazing man of miracles, because he was obviously God in flesh, but when the disciples went to Jesus, they never asked him, "Lord, teach us how to preach. Teach us how to teach. Teach us how to heal people."

Instead, the one thing they asked Jesus to teach them was this, "Lord, teach us to pray." Why of all the things they could have asked Jesus to teach them after watching him for three and a half years, they said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Because they realized that prayer was the secret power behind the healings, behind the miracles, behind the spectacular, behind the great teaching.

You've heard me say this many times, much prayer, much power. Little prayer in your life, little power. No prayer in your life, no power. They said, "Lord, teach us how to pray." The truth is if we were honest, most of us, we're not very confident about prayer. In fact, prayer is confusing to most of us.

What I want to do is take the worry out of prayer for you. When you leave here at the end of this service, I want you to be able to go, "I am confident. I know how and what to pray."

Let's begin by looking at Luke 11:1-2, there at the beginning of your notes, Jesus' followers said, *"Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."* He said to them, *"When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.'"*

We don't realize how shocking that statement was, because up to this time in history, nobody called God 'Father'. They called him a lot of other things, but Jesus said, "I'm here to tell you that when you pray, you are to call God Father." He says, "If you understand this, it's going to change the way you pray. You're going to pray much more confidently. You're not going to worry. You're not going to be so insecure about it." What Jesus is saying is prayer is not about words.

It doesn't matter what words you say. You don't have to be eloquent. Jesus says, "Prayer is not about your words. It's about a relationship. And it's a very special kind of relationship, like a father to a child. It's to be intimate. It's to be loving. It's to be casual. It's to be no barriers." A little child doesn't walk into the presence of her father and wonder about, "How do I say this?" A little child just walks in and says it in the best language they've got at that particular age and stage of life.

God is saying here, "Prayer is not about words. It's about a relationship." He says, "When you start, you start with, *"Father."* He's saying, "To be confident in prayer, you got to have the right relationship idea in your mind." God is not some impersonal force, "May the force be with you." No, he says, "To pray, you got to realize God is your Father."

Actually, Jesus says, I want you to call God Abba, A-B-B-A. That's not the Swedish rock group. It's an Aramaic term. Every child who is born in the Middle East, the first word they learn is abba. It means papa, dada. It's like mama. It's something very easy to say. What abba means is not even father, it means daddy. It's a term of endearment. It's a term of love. God says, "When you pray, the first thing you got to get right is the relationship. You got to realize, I'm not some CEO sitting up there in the sky waiting to judge your prayer. I'm your abba. I'm your daddy. And you can come to me in a loving, gentle, trusting, intimate relationship like a little child."

Now, Jesus has a lot to say about prayer. This morning, I want us to just look at one set of verses by Jesus, just five verses in the Sermon on the Mount. In these verses, Jesus gives us three reasons why you can always pray with confidence no matter who you are.

This will change your life. It will change the whole way you look about prayer if you'll do it the way Jesus said. In Matthew 7:7-11, this is in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, He says this, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."* This is a promise. By the way, the verbs there, ask, seek, and knock, they're actually present participles in the Greek. Jesus is actually saying there, "Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking." Don't just ask, seek, and knock one time.

If I told you, "Go over to that house and knock on the door, and when the door opens, they're going to give you a million dollars," you wouldn't walk up and go knocks and walk away. No. if you knew a million dollars was behind there, you'd start knocking, and you'd keep knocking, and you'd keep knocking until the door opened. God says, "Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. In short, be persistent in your prayer. Let's continue in verse 8, *"For anyone who asks will receive; [That's a promise.] Anyone who seeks will find, and to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."*

I remember when I was in college, I stayed at a dorm and I put a sign on the door of my room, "Knock and it shall be opened. Open and you shall be knocked." No one dared to enter my room without knocking.

Then Jesus says this in verse 9 , *"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

In that passage there, he gives us three reasons why you can have confidence that God will answer your pray, that God knows your heartaches when you pray, that God understands and will respond according to your need.

These truths will change your life. This morning I'd like to share this with you. Number one, the first thing God teaches us in this passage is that God promises to answer if I keep asking.

1. God promises to answer if I keep asking.

Jesus says, "Keep on asking and you'll be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, seeking, and you'll find. Keep on knocking and the door will be opened. For anyone who asks will receive, anyone who seeks will find, and everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." What's the difference between asking, seeking, and knocking? It's just three ways of saying the same thing.

If you take the first letter of each word, ask, seek, and knock, what does that spell? Ask. Yes, Jesus is just saying ask three different ways, but what he's saying actually is this, "Proximity to your heavenly Father makes the difference." Let me explain.

When I'm close to my Father, I just ask. In other words, if I'm a little kid and I'm at home, and my dad is sitting there in the living room, and I have something I need from him, I don't send him an email. I don't call him on the phone. I don't text him. If I'm close to my father, I just go, "Hey dad, I need..." and then I ask.

When you're close to God, then all you need to do is just ask, like the child asks a father, "God, I need this. Daddy, Abba, I need this." When you're close to God, you just ask.

But sometimes, I'm not close to my father. Sometimes, you're not close to God. Sometimes, I have something I want to ask my dad, and as a little kid, I'd go, "Well, he's not here in the living room, so I have to go seek him." I go look in the backyard, "Is Dad in the backyard? I want to ask him a question." No, he's not there. I want to go to the garage, "Is Dad in the garage?" No, he's not there. When I'm not close to my Father, I must seek.

I have to seek Him. I have to seek Him when I'm distant from God, when He's not close. Then sometimes, my dad is behind the wall, and I have to knock.

When a wall keeps me from seeing my Father, I knock.

When he's in the room with me, I just ask. When I don't know where God is, when I'm distant from God, I seek. When there's a barrier between me and God, I knock. So, I just go up and knock on the door, and Dad goes, "Who is this?" "It's me, Dad." "Come on in." There's no problem, no hassle. I just knock, "Is it okay for me to come in?" "Yeah, come on in. Come on in."

What is Jesus saying in all this? Listen very closely, it doesn't matter how close you are to God or how far away you are to God. God still wants you to ask.

Listen to this, some of you think, "I'm not worthy to ask God. I'm too far away from God right now." God says, "No, you can ask. You can seek. You can knock." It doesn't matter what the distance is. It doesn't matter whether you're close or you're far away. The very act of you asking, seeking and knocking is going to bring you closer. So, you see, the focus here is on the father heart of God. Not on you. Jesus wants you to know that God the Father is a loving God and he cares for you and will respond to you whatever your spiritual condition is.

Now, it sounds like I can just ask for anything. The answer is you can ask for anything. It doesn't mean God's going to give it. God always answers every prayer, always, but he doesn't always say yes. Remember, as Bill Hybels put it: there are four ways God answers prayers. "If the request is wrong, God says, No. If the timing is wrong, God says, Slow. If you are wrong, God says, Grow. But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, Go!"

In other words, God has some things he wants you to understand about prayer. That leads us to the second reason that I can always pray with confidence, and it's this, write this down,

2. God will never give me anything that is unhelpful.

This is going to help you build confidence, because you don't often know what to pray. So, you say, "I don't know if this is good for me or not. God will never give me anything that's unhelpful." Folks, he will not give you everything you want, because not everything you want would be helpful.

In Matthew 7:9-10, He says, "*Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?*" Of course not. Of course, God would not do that to you, and you wouldn't do it to your child. If your child came in and said, "Mommy, I'm hungry." You wouldn't say, "Oh here, have a stone. Eat a rock."

“Daddy, please give me fish.” You wouldn’t go, “Here’s a snake, son. Bite it before it bites you.” By the way, this is humor in the Bible. It's okay to laugh at this. This is Hebrew humor, humor by exaggeration.

Jesus has several laugh lines in the Sermon on the Mount, and this is one of them. He's going, "It's ridiculous to think that a mother or father if they came and asked you for some food, you'd say, ‘Well here, bite a rock.’" No, he wouldn't do that. If you ask God for something good, he is saying here, God is never going to give you something bad. Let me repeat that. He's never going to give you something bad. If you ask for something worthwhile, "I want some bread," he is not going to give you something worthless. He will never give you anything worthless.

By the way, the opposite is true of this, too. If you ask for something bad, God's not going to give you that either. Why? Because God is a good, loving God. He knows what you need better than you do. He knows what will make you happy more than you do. He knows your life more than you do. He understands what makes you tick, what will make you fulfilled, what will give your life meaning and significance more than you do.

A lot of times, we feel incompetent or unconfident about prayer, because we go, "I don't know if I should really be praying for this." For example, "God, I'd really like to marry that person, but what if that’s the wrong person," or, "God, I'd really like to have that job, but what if it was the wrong job for me?"

God says, "It doesn't matter what you pray, because I'm the one who's going to decide if it's good or not, not you." You don't have to know or figure out if the prayer is a good one or not. Just ask. You can ask for anything. God will sort it out. That's a great stress reliever in prayer.

Now, let me give you the third reason we can pray with confidence. So, Jesus says, "First, God promises to answer if I keep asking.

Second, God will never give me anything that's unhelpful. That's confidence. The third reason, I can always pray with confidence is because

3. God will only give me what's best for me.

He says that in the next verse. God will only give me what's best for me. That gives me a lot of confidence when I pray. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus says, *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

This gives me a lot of confidence praying too. You see, Jesus is making a comparison between parents who are imperfect and God who is perfect. Jesus is talking about our sinful nature and, of course, parents are including in there. Despite the sinful nature of parents, they give their children good things. That is why in the earlier verse, Jesus says that even though a parent may be imperfect, he or she wouldn't think of giving a stone to a hungry child.

God is perfect. That's why we can have confidence that he will give you the best when you ask. He can even give you more than what you ask. *Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."*

You see, God is not a vending machine. You put money in the vending machine, press a few buttons, and you're going to get stuff that has carcinogens in it, and stuff that could harm you. God is not a vending machine. In fact, I've noticed that in vending machines, it never has the best stuff. Unlike a vending machine, God will only give you the best.

He's not your vending machine, but he is your Father, and he loves you more than you even love yourself. God says, "I am your loving heavenly Father, and I'm waiting to answer your prayers."

Now, this message actually closes this series. I know we should have one more but I thought I would invite a pastor who will share with us a message of encouragement next week. He is Pastor Dave Rhodenhizer of Calvary Road Baptist Church. So, next Sunday will be a special day which I'm calling "Day of Encouragement." Pastor Rhodenhizer will just share with us how to keep on hoping, how to look beyond our circumstances, and how to keep on looking to Jesus.

We all need some encouragement and refreshing, right? And I need a break, too.

Now, to close this series, let me just share with you a breakthrough I experienced years ago. I hope this will help you to see how faithful God is and how he can do a miracle in your impossible situation.

Many years ago, I was about 30, I was at a point in my life when I felt like God was so far from me, that he didn't care for me. It was because I was a backslidden Christian for ten years and when God started to call me back to him, I had a problem loving him again. My heart became cold and hard. I thought he abandoned me for 10 years when in fact I was the one who turned away from him. But the fact is, I had a heart problem. I couldn't feel a love for him anymore. But I knew I must go back because I was lost, I was a total spiritual wreck. God started to speak to my heart and directed me to go through a disciple training program under Youth With A Mission in Hawaii. And there, I told God, "Lord, I'm serious about knowing you intimately once again. I want to feel my love for you again. Please do something so I can be the Christian that I was before." I decided that I would fast every Friday lunchtime throughout my training, which was five months in total, until God answered my prayer.

And so, that's what I did, from the start of my training in January I would skip lunch and spend around 30 minutes in my room praying. The lecture phase was in Hawaii for three months.

Afterwards, we went to a city in Russia called Krasnodar for the outreach phase. I continued my fasting. In Russia, our schedule was we would visit an elementary school in the morning where we would do presentations, preached the gospel, and distribute literature in the auditorium. Afterwards, we would go back to the youth hostel where we stayed to have lunch. And every time, of course, I wouldn't join my co-trainees for lunch in the mess hall and instead go to my room to pray.

But you know what, it came to a point when I felt frustrated because it seems that God was still far away. One time, after leading worship in the auditorium, I spoke to my group leader and broke down. I told him that I couldn't lead worship anymore because I couldn't feel the love of God. I played the guitar and sang but it was just mechanical. I just didn't want to do it anymore. And I thought, God wasn't paying attention to my prayer and fasting. My leader just encouraged me and prayed for me.

A few weeks passed, and then, one day, after a busy day in an elementary school, we came back to the hostel. Everyone went straight to the mess hall while I passed by the lobby on my way to my room as was my custom since I was fasting. As I entered the lobby, I noticed someone sitting on a chair in one corner of the lobby. I recognized that it was Greg, one of our young Russian interpreters who accompanied us to the schools. So, I sat down on a chair next to him. I saw that he looked troubled. I asked how he was and then he opened up. "Rolly, I came here because I want to talk to someone. My parents are angry with me." "Why?" I asked him. "It's because I told them I want to know more about Jesus." He looked so sad.

Greg was an atheist. His parents were atheist. You know, they grew up in a Communist country. But Greg, because he was our interpreter and he mingled with us, he learned about the gospel and came to know who Jesus was.

I then asked him if he wanted to know more about Jesus and he said “yes” and I presented the gospel to him. When I asked him if he wanted to receive Jesus, he said “yes” readily and he prayed the sinner’s prayer. When he looked up, there were tears in his eyes. I realized that I was so touched by what happened that I felt excited about God again. That afternoon, when our group met for an evaluation of the day, I shared with them my experience with Greg and the more I shared the more God was touching me heart. And that was the breakthrough I was seeking for. God melted my heart because of that experience. And I began to love him again. He did for me what he says in Ezekiel 36:26, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” And the rest is history.

Folks, God is faithful. He will answer your prayers, he will never give you anything that is unhelpful, and he will always give you the best.