

LIFE-CHANGING PRAYER

Receiving Mercy

Sooner or later God will permit a situation where you have nothing but Him and His promises. It is at these times that you can run to the throne of grace. – Jim Cymbala

Justice – mercy – grace – entire volumes have been written about each of these words in the Christian vocabulary. However, their definitions are simple. **Justice** is getting what we deserve; **mercy** is not getting the punishment we deserve; **grace** is getting good things we do not deserve.

For an example of justice vs. mercy vs. grace, let's consider them from an illustration of being caught driving above the speed limit. You have just received a call that a family member has been taken to the hospital when you are pulled over by a police officer for going 80 miles an hour in a 55 mph zone and he writes you a ticket. This is justice because even though you had a good reason you were still breaking the law by speeding. On the other hand, you receive mercy from the officer when you explain to him your reason for speeding and he gives you a verbal warning and writes no ticket! You become a recipient of the officer's grace when after you have explained your situation, he quickly says, "Follow me" as he jumps into his car, turns on the blue light and leads you to the hospital. Our God is more merciful and gracious than any human being will ever be! When we accept Christ as Savior, we are given an unlimited invitation to come to His throne of grace.

When John and I were younger, we made frequent trips to Georgia to visit his family. On one occasion, we decided that it would be fun to go there unannounced. When we knocked on the back door of his Aunt Hazel's house, she saw us through the window and we heard her running through the house shouting, "my babies, my babies!" We were bold enough to go to Georgia unannounced because we were confident of the family's welcoming love for us. We can go boldly to the throne of grace. Why? Because we can be confident of our God's love for us.

The Lord invites you to come to Him in prayer. The great adventure awaits! – David Jeremiah

*Matthew 7:7-11 (ESV)*⁷ "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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?¹¹ If you then, who are 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!

This passage is taken from a portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The purpose of asking, seeking, and knocking at the throne of heaven is so that we can experience the privilege of participating in the work of kingdom of God. Jesus' command to ask is not a 'blank check' to receive our wants.

Notice how frequently Jesus tells us to ask! He says it five times in this particular passage. However, we all know that we ask for things that we do not receive. There are reasons that we do not get the answers we prefer.

1. **James 4:2 (ESV)** ² ... *You do not have, because you do not ask.* Wouldn't be sad that we did not receive an answer from God for the simple reason that we did not ask Him? We may have talked about our problems to others – we probably have complained vocally about our troubles – we may have even asked others to pray for us – but have we had a personal conversation with God about the matter? When you have a problem, the best place to start is by asking God. Why is going to God about things that concern us so often our last thought instead of our first?

2. **James 4:3 (ESV)** ³ *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* Personally, I forget to ask God first when "**I want**" something. For example, it is easy to buy something and then ask God later if that purchase was in His will for me. It is always best to ask God first if what I want is what He wants. **Psalms 37:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

3. **James 1:6 (ESV)** ⁶ *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.* Let's not make the mistake of doubting our God. He is a supernatural God.

We must learn to abide in Christ. **John 15:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* The natural response to abiding in Christ is that we will have continual conversations with Him. Those who abide in Christ are praying people.

Let's return our thoughts to the Sermon on the Mount! Jesus tells us to Ask – Seek – Knock. Notice how these three words together make an acrostic.

Ask
Seek
Knock

Each word brings more intensity to our prayer. We are supposed to ask and if we do not receive an immediate answer we are to seek. We seek God more than once for an answer – meaning we knock at the throne of grace. At times we have a tendency to lean towards despair – thinking

God cannot or will not answer. Maybe the situation is so serious, it would take a miracle.

Jeremiah 32:27 (ESV) ²⁷ *“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? There is nothing too hard for God. Ours is a supernatural relationship with the Living God. God was a miracle worker in Bible times and He still is! Let’s go back to an Old Testament example.*

Elijah declared that it would not rain in **1 Kings 17:1 (ESV)** ¹ *Now Elijah...said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”* The Canaanites believed that their false god, Baal, controlled the rain. The Israelites were following ‘the Baals. After Elijah’s prophecy it did not rain. They had come into the third year and the water situation was desolate. Immediately after Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Elijah stepped out on faith!

1 Kings 18:41-45 (ESV) ⁴¹ *And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain.”* ⁴² *So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees.* ⁴³ *And he said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” And he went up and looked and said, “There is nothing.” And he said, “Go again,” seven times.* ⁴⁴ *And at the seventh time he said, “Behold, a little cloud like a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” And he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.’”* ⁴⁵ *And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain...*

Elijah made a ‘weather forecast.’ He told King Ahab he heard the sound of rain before the rain arrived. Elijah prays for rain, he pleads for rain, he waits for God’s answer. He is helpless before God. While Elijah prayed, his servant watched and the servant kept reporting back that there was nothing there – not a cloud in the sky. Naturally, Elijah would have been disappointed. After all, he had just boldly told the king that it was about to rain. We all are disappointed when our answers do not come immediately. We prefer immediate answers. God did not jump at Elijah’s request. That should be encouraging for us – that’s is why Jesus said – ask – seek – knock. And that is exactly what Elijah did for seven times as he remained bowed down with his head between his knees. R.T. Kendall explains that we should always begin by praying for mercy, and then we will find grace! Jesus taught that we should never give up. **Luke 18:1 (ESV)** ¹ *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*

Elijah told his servant to go back seven times. Kendall says, “Keep watching. God is never too early, never too late, but always just on time.” When the servant reported that he saw a small cloud, the size of a man’s hand, Elijah knew that the sound of rain he had heard was real. His God had heard his prayer and was answering that prayer. There are times when God moves slowly by our calculations but then His answer comes suddenly!

Finally, we must learn to ask, seek and knock in the Spirit.

Ephesians 6:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*

Pray all the time. This does not mean to continually be reciting prayers. In another portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said in **Matthew 6:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Jesus desires for us to be in continual communication with Him. In other words, we keep our ‘phone line’ to God open.*

Pray in the Spirit. That rules out prayers of the flesh. Only under the Spirit’s power can we pray in the will of God. Wiersbe reminds us, “It is possible to pray fervently in the flesh and never get through to God. It is also possible to pray quietly in the Spirit and see God’s hand do great things.”

Pray with all prayer. There are various ways to pray. **1 Timothy 2:1-2 (ESV)** ¹ *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.* The believer who prays only to ask for things is missing out on blessings that come with intercessions and giving of thanks. Thanksgiving is a great prayer weapon for defeating Satan. Consider this: **Praise changes things!** No matter where we are – no matter the circumstances – it should be our calling to make wherever we are into a place of praise to the Almighty God.

Pray with your eyes open. Paul said to keep alert! In the Old Testament, Nehemiah restored the wall around Jerusalem by watching and praying. **Nehemiah 4:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.* We may or may not need a physical guard but Jesus did say this in **Mark 14:38 (ESV)** ³⁸ *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Prayer is not getting man’s will done in heaven
but getting God’s will done on earth. – Tests of Life

Keep on praying. That is perseverance! This doesn’t mean that we are out to ‘twist God’s arm’. Perseverance means that we have a burden and we do not rest until we receive God’s answer. Let’s never make the mistake of quitting our prayer before a matter is settled. Often our prayers are answered in what we would consider the ‘last minute.’ So keep on praying. Don’t give up.

God is waiting for **you** at the throne of grace. Pray personally, pray specifically, and pray persistently.

Pray! God is listening!