

Title: “House of Prayer – Prayer Requires & Creates Restful Trust & Confident Hope” - Matthew 7:7-11

Aim: The imp of persistent passion & also humble trust in prayer.

Intro: I deeply love our granddaughters - so much so that I would never knowingly do anything or give them anything that would hurt them, even if they were asking for it. But, pretty much anything else goes. If I don't have a good reason to tell either of them “no,” I won't. I do tell them “no” because there are good reasons, but if I don't have to... I'd like to think that I've been an ok father – tho failed in many areas - & that I'm a good grandfather, but it goes w/out saying that there's absolutely no comparison between the kind of father/grandfather I am & the kind of Father God is. God has no grandchildren – only children! But just as I, a fleshly, evil man, want my children/grandchildren to trust me, so God wants His children to trust Him, even when it seems things are not as we want. Theme: House of Prayer – God has called His children to be people of prayer, encountering Him day by day & being the instruments by which He helps others encounter Him, too. Again, we've been considering what Tim Keller, in his book entitled Prayer, called touchstones of prayer – measurements of genuine prayer. We've seen what prayer is: work, requiring time/effort; word, listening to God in His Word & responding to Him. Prayer is also balance, asking, praising, confessing, thanking God. We talked about what prayer requires: grace – only by God's grace can we know Him & approach Him thru the atoning work of Christ; fear – a healthy, loving awe of God, humble reverence; helplessness – understanding & accepting our weaknesses & total dependence on God. Then we saw what prayer gives: perspective, reorienting our view toward God; strength – as we seek spiritual union w/God; spiritual reality – seeking a sense of the presence of God. Last week we began to look at where prayer takes us: to self-knowledge. Prayer requires & creates honesty (w/ourselves &

w/God) & self-knowledge. If you truly encounter the living God, you will not, cannot stay the same, but will see yourself as you really are & should thus respond to God w/humility & a cry for His mercy. Today we consider the 2nd in this category of where prayer takes us: Prayer takes us to trust. Keller wrote: “Prayer requires & creates both restful trust & confident hope.” However, this journey to trust may take us thru dark valleys & requires endurance, persistence, & boldness in prayer.

Abraham of old, boldly petitioned God on behalf of Sodom (Gen.18) – “If there are 50 righteous found there, will you spare it? 45? 40? 30? 20? 10? Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” Sometimes we need to passionately cry out to God & persist in prayer, to shake the gates of heaven & not let go, like Jacob wrestling w/God (Gen.32). But there is also a need in prayer for leaving a matter w/God & accepting His will. There is a balance in genuine prayer of that passion & acceptance. Our Lord Jesus is the best example possible. He earnestly prayed in the Garden, “Father, please, let this cup pass from Me. If there is any other way, let’s do it.” He sweat drops of blood because of the anguish He experienced. Yet, He submitted to His Father’s will – “Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). In the same way, we are to earnestly petition God, but at the same time humble submit to God & trust His goodness. Our text bears out this balance in a wonderful way - Matthew 7:7-11 – [READ]. This is, of course, a part of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount,” recorded by Matthew in chapters 5-7 of his gospel account. Jesus had already said much about prayer, giving His listeners a model prayer, which we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” Now He turns our attention back to prayer, inviting us to pray & giving us a wonderful promise. 2 imp thoughts have been noted by several commentators. 1) There seems to be a progression of passion/intensity in vs7-8. Ask – “beg, call for, crave, desire” – this is simply making our requests known to God, pleading for His help. The

reward for those who ask is to be given. God delights to give His children what they ask – if they ask in faith & not for that which will be hurtful to them. To seek is a little more intense – searching in order to find – looking for the favor/face of God. The promise is that those who seek – w/all their heart – find what they need – find God in the midst of the storm, His abiding presence in time of need, His answer. Then, to knock is more intense still – knocking at a door, & not stopping until someone answers; knocking hard, in order to be heard. If I’ve locked myself out of the house & Andi is home, I knock hard in order to be heard – because a fan might be on, or the TV. There’s an urgency to knocking. “Anybody there/listening?” God promises to open the door to those who are knocking, the door of His very throne room. The 2nd thought that commentators agree on is that 2) the verbs, ask, seek, & knock are each in the present perfect tense, which means it calls for a continuing action. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. In other words, don’t give up in your prayers. Be persistent; be passionate; be earnest. David Gudzik wrote, “God promises an answer to the one who diligently seeks Him. Don’t ask God to care about something we care little or nothing about. Persistent prayer does not overcome God’s stubborn reluctance; it gives glory to Him, expresses dependence on Him, & aligns our heart more w/His.” Keller quoted Norwegian author Ole Hallesby, who wrote that prayer is “work & wrestling.” Dare to persistently keep asking, keep seeking, & keep knocking, expecting God to give, be found, & open the door. Be confident, hopeful, because God is God – good, faithful. The balance of that persistence, however, is surrender to & rest in God. Jesus gives a wonderful expression of the trust-worthiness of God, by comparing Him to earthly fathers, who want good for their children. He asks 2 rhetorical questions followed by an emphatic statement. Would a father, asked by his child for bread/ something to eat, give him a stone – which would break his

teeth & not be nutritious? No, of course not! A father wants to feed his child what is good, nutritious, enjoyable (tho peas may not fall into that category – just ask Blythe). A father would not give his child all candy, tho the child might like that until he is sick to his stomach. Rather he would feed him a balanced diet, good for him, to help hem grow, be healthy. The next rhetorical question is even more outlandish. Would a father give his child a serpent/snake when he has asked for a fish? No! A snake might indeed harm the child. No loving father would do that. Then Jesus offered a most logical & hope filled & trust building statement. ***“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!”*** By using the word “evil” here, Jesus is not saying that good fathers are evil, but then again, He is. The best of earthly fathers is evil, sinful, in need of a Savior. But God is the perfect Father. So, if we, even in our sinful nature, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will God, the perfect Father, give good gifts to those who ask? That “much more” means “more by far, more willingly, more readily.” Several imp thoughts here: 1) Begs the question of whether or not we are His children. Regardless of what many think & say, tho we are all created by God, we are not all children of God. ***“To be God’s children, you have to be born again.” “...To all who did receive Him [Jesus], who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”*** (John 1:12-13). If you are not a born again believer in Christ as Savior & have not surrender your life to Him as Lord, you are not a child of God. Prayer is an exercise in futility for you unless you are asking for God’s mercy & seeking relationship w/Him. 2) We who are children of God can persist in prayer & not give up, knowing that God does hear us, & will give us good gifts in response, because He is a faithful & good Father. Rest in

the fact that you are His child! 3) God only gives good gifts to those who are His children. Even having to wait may be part of God's good gift. He is teaching you, shaping you, maybe working out a better solution/provision than you've asked for. Maybe He's protecting you, His child, from an unseen danger & that is why He hasn't given you what you have asked. Will you trust that your Father knows what you need? Will you trust that He knows what is best? 4) Don't give up in prayer, but maybe you should ask God what He has in mind & surrender your will to His. When God seems to be saying "no" or "wait," wouldn't we be wise to say "yes, Lord"? The bottom line is that we really do need to surrender, but surrender to God is rest! Raised hands – "I surrender" – not fighting any more. And we're not surrendering to an enemy when we surrender to God, but to our Father/friend. One day when we were keeping Ivy, it was obvious that she was very tired, but she fought it tooth & nail. I finally picked her up, grabbed her bottle, & held her close & walked w/her, speaking gently in her ear. She calmed down, we sat down, she fought again, but then surrendered & slept. Aren't we like that w/God sometimes – fighting & resisting the very One who loves us & calls us to rest in Him? Sometimes it looks/feels like what God has given us is a stone/snake. Surrender/hold on to Him until He shows you it really is bread/a fish – what is best. May not see it until get to the eternal kingdom, but hold on. 5) We do need to ask – "to those who ask Him." God wants His children to ask Him for help, His presence, His direction, His provision, etc. He wants us to seek His face & not give up. Some of us may ask for years before we see any results & perhaps grow weary in the process. It is then that we need to again surrender & rest, trusting that our Father hears & will only give good gifts. Knowing that God is our good & perfect Father, we can have confident hope in Him, persisting in prayer, yet resting in & trusting our Father. Keller again quoted Ole

Hallesby, who likened “prayer to mining as he knew it in Norway in the early 20th century. Demolition to create mine shafts took 2 basic kinds of action. There are long periods of time...‘when the deep holes are being bored w/great effort into the hard rock.’ To bore the holes deeply enough into the most strategic spots for removing the main body of rock was work that took patience, steadiness, & a great deal of skill. Once the holes were finished, however, the ‘shot’ was inserted & connected to a fuse. ‘To light the fuse & fire the shot is not only easy but also very interesting...One sees results...shots resound, & pieces fly in every direction.’ He concludes that while more the painstaking work takes both skill & patient strength of character, ‘anyone can light a fuse.’ This helpful illustration warns us against doing only ‘fuse-lighting’ prayers, the kind that we soon drop if we do not get immediate results. If we believe both in the power of prayer & in the wisdom of God, we will have a patient prayer life of ‘hole-boring.’ We must combine tenacious importunity, a ‘striving w/God,’ w/deep acceptance of God’s wise will, whatever it is.” God has said, “My house shall be called a house of prayer.” Let us be His people of prayer!