



When God Speaks
Part 3 – Answers to Our Prayers
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If you're new to our church, we say welcome. We are in a series called *When God Speaks*. Today, we are in part three – *Answers to Our Prayers*. The title was selected before we got the announcement this week that Garth Brooks is coming to the Ozarks. And this is my final announcement for the day, but tickets go on sale Friday at 10:00 am. You can join 50,000 of your closest friends here in the Ozarks and it is going to be something just to see how we get 50,000 cars around that roundabout on 86. I'm going just to watch that.

You know Garth Brooks has a song called *Unanswered Prayers*. My kids joke with me all the time. They're like, "Dad, you don't have to fix the lyrics in every country song we listen because you're constantly giving us the theology correction." I said, "Technically, we don't believe in unanswered prayers because God hears our prayers, and he answers our prayers. Today, we going to see that sometimes the answer is not what you're demanding as you pray. It's not what I'm demanding as I pray.

Today, we're talking about entering into a passionate, persistent, trust relationship with our Heavenly Father. If you want to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7, Jesus is going to show us what it means to be persistent in our prayer life, what it means to trust that our Heavenly Father has our best in mind, and that we would pray according to his will. In other words, a lot of times our prayer can be about what we want, but maybe today is a turning point for you and a turning point for me that we no longer just pray what we want, but our heart and prayer is "God, what do you want? What is your plan for my life? What is your desire for my life?"

As parents, we love teaching our children, and prayer is one of those areas we love teaching them. These are several prayers given by children:

I love this first one from a preschool girl. *"Dear Lord, Please send a new baby for mommy. The new baby you sent last week cries too much."*

This young man said, *"Dear Jesus, I need you to make my mom not allergic to cats. I really want a cat and I really don't want to ask my mom to move out."* Passionate prayers

How about this one? *"Dear God, I need a raise in my allowance. Could you have one of your angels tell my father? Thank you."*

Parents were teaching their children the Lord's Prayer and one little girl got it mixed up a little bit. She prayed, "Our father who does art in Heaven, Harold is his name." Amen.

It was actually in a church bulletin. I brought the picture to prove it. But autocorrect or spellcheck got hold of it and changed it. They said the people in the service, when they saw it in the bulletin, prayed it with passion. And maybe you would pray the same thing too if you saw it. "Deliver us from email." And all the teachers said... Amen.

Years ago, Jane Boone emailed me... There are two things I do often when I teach or preach or lead out in a service. I'll say, "And everyone agreed and said..." or I'll say, "And it's in the name of Jesus that we prayed and said..." So, their daughter, Lauren Boone, kind of came up with her own version of it when she was young. Jane said, "Around the dinner table, whenever Lauren prays, she ends her prayers always like this: *"And everyone agreed with Ted and said..."* Lauren is an adult now. I texted Jane last night and said, "I'm sorry, I know this is a long time ago, but which daughter said that?" She said, "It was Lauren, and just so you know, Ted, she stills prays that at the end of her prayers."

In Matthew 7, Jesus invites us to be persistent in prayer. That's how this begins. You've heard the ask, seek, knock, but we really want to see it today as Jesus gives it to us in this relationship of a father with his daughter and a father with his son.

Let me ask moms this question: Have you ever had to tell your child no? Raise your hand if you ever told your child no. Let me ask this question: After you said no, was that the last question your child ever asked you? Did it stop your child from asking you questions? No. They didn't get the answer they were looking for, but they kept asking you questions, they kept coming after you.

But as you grow older and children get a little wiser, they realize they need to change the way they ask the question. Maybe their tone changed and they weren't as demanding with what they wanted. I'm talking like a four-year-old now. But then as they get older, they realize there is even a time of day that works better for making this request. The point is they keep coming after you. They don't stop when they don't get the answer they are looking for.

Here's what we know and what Jesus is going to teach us today. The Father gives good gifts to his children. He has our best in mind. He hears every prayer, he answers every prayer, but instead of me demanding my will in heaven, I want to see his will in my life and on earth.

Jesus starts in Matthew 7: 7 - **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.** Ask, seek, knock. We get this beautiful picture of a child who is being persistent, going after a parent.

Now, where do you go in your home when you just want a little alone time? Mom and dad, where do you go? The bathroom. We call them bathrooms. I prefer restroom. Use it with its intended purpose in mind... rest. Just find rest when you need a break. If you've ever been in the restroom and you hear what? "MOM! DAD!" They are asking for you and do you respond? No. You sit there and you hope

they'll stop asking. Do they stop asking? No. You hear the feet moving around the house. Sometimes the voice gets faint, sometimes it gets louder as they hone in on you. They are seeking you. And when they get to the door and you've turned off the light, what do you hear? They start knocking on the door. And if you don't answer that, you see this (shows a picture of a little hand under the restroom door) "It's three minutes. I just want three minutes. You're not going to die without me out there." Guess what? It plays itself out over and over again in your home. What a beautiful picture for you and for me about prayer.

Have you given up on praying because you ain't getting the answers you want? Are you giving up on prayer because maybe you don't feel like you are being heard? Jesus says it this way as he continues, so ask, seek, knock, go after it.

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... Mom and Dad, **...who are evil...** What is he saying here? You are sinful and you **...know how to give good gifts to your children...** You know how to meet their requests, to answer their requests. You do that, Mom and Dad, it's in you, you want to protect and provide for your children. It goes on to say... **how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!** He wants us asking, seeking, knocking, and trusting that he has our good in mind.

And believing... Some of us trust so much that we've stopped praying. God has my best in mind. He doesn't need to hear from me; I trust him completely. If you trust him completely, ask, seek, knock. Continue to press in.

John Piper puts it this way in answering two very important questions and referring to this text. Questions people always have are... Does God hear my prayers? And Does he respond to my prayers? Or Does he answer my prayers?

John Piper says this. *"God never ignores his children. He's never too busy. Never lacking in resources. Never confused. Never ill-disposed. He is always attentive."*

I want to pause right here in the quote because when I think about "though you are evil" and I think about myself as a dad, my kids don't always have my attention. I can be easily distracted as a parent. I can sometimes be too busy and can look at our kids sometimes as a distraction. I don't want to ignore them, but I have. Now he's saying, but your Heavenly Father, your perfect Heavenly Father is *"Always attentive. Always gracious. Always eager. Always wise. Always Loving. He hears every request from his humble, trusting children, and he answers with whatever is best. It always pays to pray. Always."*

But we get answers. Just like you as a parent. That's why I love this text comparing my role as a dad with my children to that of my Heavenly Father with me. Because sometimes we get this answer. We hate this answer. Who loves this word when it's being given to us? The answer "no" But as a parent, your child comes to you and says, "Mom, can I have Sour Patch Kids for dinner?" Your answer is, "No." Why do you say no to Sour Patch Kids for Dinner? Because you have their health in mind. You have their wellbeing in mind. You care for your kids. You're providing for your kids with a no.

And then, they come in and they go, "Can I have a snack?" That's not a hard "no," but it's "not now." "Why not!?" "Well, it's because dinner is in 30 minutes. It's not now... Does that mean you're never getting a snack again? Does that mean Little Debbie will never cross the threshold of our home again? No, it's just not now. I know when dinner is coming. You're playing around and you're not paying attention. I know what's best," Mom and dad are saying. But then there are times... "Can I have a Swiss Cake Roll?" And the answer is, "Yes."

Here's the bottom line as we move from this passionate pursuit, persistent pursuit in prayer and trust relationship. **Our loving heavenly Father hears every prayer and answers for your good and his glory.** Every prayer he hears and answers for your good and for his glory. Are you trusting in him? Are you still making demands, wanting your way?

I heard Francis Chan speak this week. It was one of the best messages I've heard him give. It was a short piece, He was talking to the younger generation, but he said, "*Here's the problem with your generation. The problem is...*" and I see this today, *He said, "You value your thoughts too much."*

Scripture tells us His thoughts are greater than ours and his ways are greater than ours, and we need to be pursuing those. Remember we looked at it. His will is in his Word. And you're valuing your thoughts too much. And in your prayer, what do you need to be doing? What do I need to be doing? I need to be leaning in, trusting my Heavenly Father, seeking his will, and seeking his way and his thoughts for the next steps of my life.

My daughter and son have trusted me their whole life. And I think the picture that we always use when we talk about a child trusting a parent is the child on the side of the pool and we're saying jump for the first time. "Jump into my arms. You can trust me." And nine times out of ten, they can. But we've had the moments where we weren't there for our kids in a way.

My daughter was in the last service. She's married now, but probably ten years ago, she was young, and we went to Cabo Mexico on vacation. Again, Midwest people at the beach, it can be very dangerous. We don't know how to behave, we don't know the rules. I didn't know what the red flag meant waving outside the hotel. There was nobody on the beach. There was one guy out there swimming. He went down under the waves, and I guess you can do that, but I've never seen... The waves felt like as high as this ceiling. They were massive, so you weren't allowed to swim. We were standing there. You know how the Midwest people are. We're there, we have our boogie boards and we're ready to go.

My whole family is looking at me like, *what are we doing? We just booked a whole vacation here. Are we not going in the ocean?* I got this idea. Again, this is how you'll know I'm from Illinois. I go, "Here's what we're going to do, Corynn. When the waves go out... I've timed them. We're going to run down there, set the boogie board on the sand, and you're going to jump on it. When the wave comes back in, it's going to gently lift you up." I was convinced of this myself. "And it's going to bring you up on the shore where I'll be waiting." So, we timed it just right. I sat the boogie board down and I got out of there as fast as I could. The wave engulfed my daughter. The guy out there comes swimming in thinking the waves are going to take my daughter out. I wave him off like we've got this under control. Just

move more over in this direction in case she comes over.” Corynn does eight somersaults up the beach, sand everywhere. She was unrecognizable when she stepped up. Her hair was matted down with sand. I go, “Was that fun? Did you have fun?” But a ten-year-old was looking at me like, *Was that what it was supposed to be, daddy?*

I want you to take a moment and think about... I could think about being in a busy downtown in a big city. My son is not a hand holder, but when he was young, when he got into a crowd and was overwhelmed, he grabbed on tight to my hand.

This is what Jesus is talking about with your Heavenly Father is caring for you. He’s always attentive. He’s always listening. So, how then do I pray?

In 1 John 5: 14-15, we read, **14 And this is the confidence...** or assurance that we have when we pray. We should approach the throne of God boldly and with confidence that he’s hearing us and he responds to our requests. This is the confidence we have in approaching God. ...**that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will...** The scripture teaches three types of will – the sovereign will of God – what his plan and purpose is and has been decreed and will happen, the moral will of God, which according to his character, it’s right and wrong, and then the permissive will of God. Yes, we live in a world filled with sin and people do sinful things to you, you do sinful things to other people, but in the midst of that, God can still work all of it together for his good. But we pray according to his will and his will is found in his Word. And ...**he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.**

Here's the difference though. I think sometimes when we talk about prayer, people confuse this loving Heavenly Father with some cosmic genie in a bottle that I just pray for whatever I want. And I just demand my way. And I bring in the list. “You're going to do this.” and “I want my will on you and I want my will in heaven.” Rather than Your will on earth.

In John 15: 7, we read about this abiding in his Word. **7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.** But isn't it interesting how we like to read the second half and focus on the second half? If you skip the first half and just read this verse... ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

It's kind of like when we read Philippians 4: 13. Many people read that passage wrong. They read it that I can do anything I want through Christ, who strengthens me. That's not at all what that verse says. It says, **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.** And it's speaking there of living your life in Christ during the extremes of life, not whatever you want to do, Christ will empower you to do, whatever your wish is. No, Jesus says, “Remain in me and my words remain in you,” aligning your will to God's, aligning my will to God's. I don't want to just give God my demands and my list.

You've heard of ACTS – Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. Sometimes we skip the adoration, confession, or thanksgiving, and we go straight to supplication. We just bring our list and say, “And this is what I want,” when our prayer needs to be saturated with, “God, what do you want from me? What is your plan for me?” Many are the plans in my heart, but you ultimately order my steps.

“God, What is your plan? I want to know it. Give me answers? I trust you completely. I trust you with the little things, I trust you with the big things. Show me. Guide me. Direct me.”

Some people at this point would say, “Why pray then? Why pray if God has decided.” Well, Jesus, as he faced the agony of the cross, he knew what lay before him. He knew what was coming and yet he prayed this: **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup (or wrath) from me;”** But he ends it with how we should be ending our prayers. **“Yet, not my will but yours be done.”** I want to pray according to your will and your purpose and your plan for my life. What is best for me? No? Not now? Yes? Some of you have big decisions to make. Some of you made a big decision in the last two years to move to Branson. If you moved to Branson in the last two years, will you raise your hand. Welcome to the Ozarks. Was that a big decision? Yeah, it was a very expensive time to move to Branson.

Moving to Branson? That’s a big deal. I talked to I don’t know how many people who wrestled with that decision. Some of you wrestled with selling your house and you really wrestled with it until the realtor showed up and told you how much it was worth. And then that was an easy decision. But you have big decisions to make.

There are students in here in their last year of high school. You’ve got a big decision to make. Where are you going after this year when you leave home? What’s happening?

James 4 tells us the same thing about the will of God. **13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit...”** So, plan, be entrepreneurial, buy, sell, do business. — **14 ...yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist... a theme all throughout scripture. ...that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say...** And we need to be praying. **“...If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”** From cover to cover in your Bible, aligning my will with God’s.

So, what do you do if you would maybe describe your prayer life as non-existent? “Ted, we pray at mealtime, but that’s pretty much it.” “Ted, we used to pray as we dropped the kids off at school, but we don’t do that anymore. School is starting back, and we are going to get back into that.” “We used to pray with the kids every night before they went to bed and now that our bedtime is before theirs, that just kind of threw things off.” I’m in that season of life. My son gets home from work, and I am crashing, ready to go to bed, but we still pray, knowing he ain’t going to bed. So, I get it. It can move from a prayerless life sometimes... Sometimes your prayer life is just in a rut. You’re not asking, seeking, knocking. It’s not a persistent, regular, ongoing, frequent prayer in your family from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep at night, as you sit at home, as you walk along the way. So, let’s talk about a reset for your prayer life. That’s what I love about going back to school week. It’s a great opportunity to reset as a family. I’ll give you four ways we can do this.

Pray for all people. The reason this is so important is because maybe your prayer life is in the rut where you're only praying for you. You are your primary prayer. And there are a lot of people around you that need prayer. You see them every day. In 1 Timothy 2, 1-2, Paul said to Timothy, **First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings...**

I want to tell you that some of you, since he has been elected, have not prayed one time for Joe Biden. Pray for Joe Biden. Some of you are like, "I do, but it's probably not what you're talking about right now, Ted." And I'm here to tell you, pray for your president. Pray for your vice-president. Pray for your senators. Pray for your congressman or woman. Pray for your aldermen, pray for your mayor. Pray for all those in leadership, **...and all those in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet lives, in all godliness and holiness.**

I just want to encourage you. Sheriff Rader was in the first service. I said, "The next time you're driving through Stone County and you pass sheriff Rader, stop and pray for him, not you. You know as well as I do that when you pass an officer, prayer starts pretty quickly. Again, it's usually for you. When is the last time you prayed for a sheriff's deputy or an officer? Protect them. They have a job where they are serving and protecting us. With all that's taken place and all the disrespect that come toward our law enforcement, they need our prayers. Pray for all people, all those in authority.

You may be like, "Boy, my kid got a rough teacher. We were praying we wouldn't get this teacher." Pray for your child's teacher. Pray for your child's administrator, so you can live quiet lives. Pray in every situation. In every situation, you're going to find people that need prayer so pray for them on the spot. Don't tell them, "I'm going to pray for you." I told some guy this week that called me for prayer. I go, "Let's pray right now." He's like, "Over the phone?" I go, "Totally legal. Yeah, we can do this right now. The NSA needs to hear it."

Pray in every situation. Philippians 4: 6 says, **⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.** Bring it to him.

Pray at all times. Well when do I pray? It doesn't get any simpler than this. Maybe you memorized it in the King James. 1 Thessalonians 5: 17 says, **Pray without ceasing.** Do you know what that means? It means pray continually. Do you know what that means? It means if you're not praying, you're about to. If you're not talking to your Heavenly Father, it's in your next sentence. Pray at all times; from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep at night. Pray as you drive down the road. Pray as you work. Pray as you mow. In a moment where you're like, *I need courage right now*, pray for courage. I need wisdom – I don't know the next... Pray for wisdom. You don't have it because you're not asking. Ask, seek, knock.

Pray in private. Matthew 6: 5-6 is not a prohibition against corporate prayer. We pray together as a church family, but what Jesus is going to say is that he is not impressed with prayers prayed to impress others. He says the same thing about giving. Matthew 6 says, **5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues... Using big, lofty, fancy words. ...and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.** What that means is they were looking to impress others, that's what they're doing, it's all they are getting; they got their reward. **6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

Pray at all times for everyone in every situation. And get alone. Again, we pray together corporately, and we will do that as we close out our service again, but when Jesus goes on and gives us the Lord's

prayer, it's interesting that some people think the Lord's prayer was given for us to recite it, but Jesus just got finished teaching that's not the purpose or it's not just about a formula to recite; it's just *pray like this*. There are six requests made in the Lord's prayer. It's interesting... if you have your Bible and want to draw a line between the top three and the bottom three, the top three are all about "I want your kingdom. Your will be done." The last three are "until your kingdom arrives, would you do the following: meet the needs of believers until your kingdom arrives, will you forgive us until that day, and will you protect us?"

Let's look at that in Matthew 6: 9 -13. ***"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ And until your kingdom arrives, ...Give us this day our daily bread... Provide for us. Ask the Lord to meet our needs.¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Forgiveness.¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*** Protection.

That's why I take Sammy Rodriguez's prayer, and I've prayed it over my kids since they were five and seven years old. Before they leave my presence, whatever we're praying for, whatever we're seeking wisdom for, guidance on, comfort. Been praying a lot this week for Dee Dodson, our dear friend who lost her husband and missionary. We've supported this precious couple for 20 years as missionaries to Tanzania. We were at Bob's funeral on Friday. And I have just been praying comfort as we mourn with hope with Dee. I encourage the church family to continue to do that. Whatever we're praying, I always end the prayer with my kids with "Father, cover them in the blood of Jesus, protect them from evil, and fulfill your purpose in their lives."

Jesus goes on in Matthew 6 with, ***33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.***

And we end as we started. Our loving Heavenly Father hears every prayer and answers for your good and his glory. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.

Father, in the name of Jesus, and in that mighty name and the authority of that name, we ask, we seek, we knock as a church. We will not stop coming to you, seeking wisdom, guidance, and understanding of your plan and purpose and will for our lives.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation, that they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, they would repent of their sin, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved. That today would be the day that they would invite Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of their lives.

Thank you for this church. May this church be known as a church of prayer where we pray for one another, we pray corporately, we pray at all times for all people in every situation. We do this in the mighty name of Jesus. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.