

Ask, Seek, Knock

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

Forerunner, "Ready Answer," January 1998

Our fifteen-year-old grand-daughter came to spend a weekend with us a few months ago. Like so many young people her age, she does not always consider the consequences of her actions. So, while she was with us, I decided to impart a little wisdom to her that she can use as she matures.

What concerned me is that from this time forward in her life, situations might arise that can cause her to rush into action without thinking things through. To help her avoid getting hurt, I wanted to impress Proverbs 11:14 on her: "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety."

Together, we went through the explanation of the verse. I stressed that she should seek the advice, not only of those who thought as she does and those of her age group, but also of some older people who can shed some light on her situation from a more mature, experienced perspective. Then, after receiving all the counsel, she should sit down and carefully evaluate what she has been told. Only then can she honestly make the best, most sound decision.

No Cost to Ask

Most of us are reluctant to request things of others. So the second thing I wanted my granddaughter to remember is that *asking is free*!

I related to her a story of when I was a salesman and enduring a terrible slump. I finally decided I would ask for orders no matter what the customer said. Even if my contact disliked me or my company, I would still *ask* for the order. The responses I received surprised me: Many ordered from me just because I asked for it!

We can receive a great deal of help if we only ask! But so many times we are reluctant to do so. Perhaps we feel that others will think we are not as bright as we want them to think we are. Of course, asking to become wiser proves just the opposite!

Some of us hesitate to request things of others because we feel we are somehow imposing on them—that we are putting them out. This may be the case with some people, but most of us like lending a hand or an ear! Seniors, especially, enjoy helping the younger generations make their way in the world.

Then again, sometimes we do not want to ask because we already know what the answer will be. We are afraid to face the facts and do what we know we should. Some people "shop" for advice that fits their desires rather than seek out wisdom no matter what it is.

In Luke 11 Christ's disciples ask Him to teach them how to pray, so He gives them the outline that we know as "the Lord's Prayer." He follows this up with a parable and instruction he wants them to understand about making requests of God.

Verses 5-9 tell the story of an individual who was traveling late into the evening, arriving at his friend's house at midnight. He catches his friend off guard and without food. His friend knows his neighbor has just baked bread and rushes over to his house to borrow three loaves. The neighbor and his family are asleep, and at first he refuses to give the loaves requested, but later he relents because of the friend's persistence.

Many think this is how God looks upon our requests of Him: that He will not respond until we irritate Him enough, until we force Him reluctantly to consider our requests. Verse 9 shows this thinking is incorrect. Jesus says:

And I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Ask means requesting something of another, often a superior. *Seek* means to endeavor to find a thing, to try to gain it, to strive after it with earnestness and zeal. *Knock* is a request for admission when the way is closed.

Jesus is telling us here that, when we are searching for an answer or a solution to a problem, we should actively expend effort to resolve the difficulty. He presents three different forms of seeking things, and each pictures different intensities of effort:

1. Asking for what is wanted. This often requires humility.
2. Seeking diligently for it. Sincerity and drive are key here.
3. Knocking on doors to gain entrance. This means being persistent, persevering and occasionally ingenious.

This process signifies that if we want answers, we must seek them with earnestness, diligence, and perseverance, or put another way, that we seek them with a proper attitude of humility, sincerity, and persistence. It also implies that we ask for things that are consistent with God's will to give us. Such things would be those He has promised to give, that are good for us, and that bring honor and glory to Him.

Attitude

As in everything we do, attitude plays a very large role. In James 3:14-16, the apostle describes the wrong approach:

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.

Verses 17-18 display the proper attitude we should have when asking something of God:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

In the next verses, James tells us why we sometimes do not receive what we ask for. We desire certain things, often to the point of lust. If we do not initially get what we want, we seek to obtain it by force, rather than steadily working for it. Some will murder, lie and steal to have things their way. James says that we do not get what we are after because we do not ask properly—we ask for things for our own pleasures (James 4:1-3).

If we had asked God for a proper thing with a humble attitude and worked honestly to gain what we wanted, respecting the rights of others, God may have given us what we wanted! Before making any request of God, we should always examine our motives to check if they are pure.

Learning About God

This applies both to our wants and our needs. But why does God want us to ask Him for our needs? He is training us to look to Him for our requirements. We may see worldly solutions to our problems, but God wants us to understand and apply His solutions. His way always works the best!

In addition, God wants us to have a right picture of Him and His perfect character. We can learn so much about Him by how He reacts to our requests. When we ask for something and He responds, the process should teach us something about the way He is and thinks. The same is true when He does not give us what we request. God designs all of our experiences with Him to aid us in growing in understanding and character.

We should not think of Him as a God who can be "talked" or "threatened" into giving us what we want. Nor should we think of Him as some in the world do, as a God who delights in seeing us squirm under our problems. And we should not picture Him as a doting grandfather who is to give us all we request of Him. He is a God from whom comes "every good gift and every perfect gift" (James 1:17), and He will never give us anything that contravenes His righteous character.

We need to come to the understanding that He is our loving Father in heaven, who is developing us for His purposes and for our good (Romans 8:28). He will supply to us what we ask in prayer, subject to it being a request that conforms to His will and that we are living His way. John writes:

And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. . . . Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (I John 3:22; 5:14-15)

In conforming to these requirements, we come to know, understand and put on God's very character. Then watch how frequently our prayers are answered!

Giving Gifts

Jesus promises in Luke 11:10:

For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

God truly wants us to have our desires, solve our problems and enter His Kingdom. He wants to give us everything that is good for us. If we, little human beings full of Satan's nature, know when and how to give our children what they want and need, how much more does God? In a parallel verse, Jesus says:

If you then, being 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. (Matthew 7: 11)

As we saw, the gifts the Father gives are good and perfect. They can be outright miracles that change our situation overnight, things like a job, a new car, an inheritance or meeting the man or woman of our dreams. How wonderful it is to receive these blessings at just the right time!

It is more likely, however, that what God gives will be spiritual, such as understanding the principles of how to apply God's wisdom or realizing that patience and steadfastness work wonders. We may have problems in our marriage, with other family members, in the work place, with personal relationships, or in raising our children—and God gives us a key to overcome them.

Human nature drives us to want our problems resolved right now or sooner, so we can get on with our lives as we want to enjoy them. But in all this, God may want us to learn our part in dealing with these specific problems. This is often far different from what we want and far better for us in the long run than it would be if He just made the problems go away.

When Jesus says, "to him who knocks it will be opened" (Luke 11:10), He means that we will gain access to something that has up to this point been closed to us. The opening may come from our own personal Bible study, from individual counseling, from a multitude of counsel, or from other circumstances. However it happens, the intent of the answer will be to teach us the principles of applying God's instruction in the Scriptures to solving our problem. Rather than just solving our problems for us, God wants us to grow in grace and in the use of His knowledge (II Peter 3:18). He is just as concerned about teaching us the process that leads to solutions as He is in supplying the solution.

Requests Denied

Would God ever refuse to grant our requests, even though what we ask for is right and good? As we saw earlier, God does place conditions on whether He responds to our requests, yet there may be times when He says, "No." He may not give us what we ask for if:

- » It would not be in our best interests based on what God is doing with us.
- » We are being tested, and God wants us to develop patience and faith.
- » God is working out a much larger purpose that we do not fully understand, such as the scattering of the church.

Sometimes the answer may be "No," "No, for now," or "No. Period." But if we ask correctly, in obedience, sincerity of heart and a right attitude, the vast majority of times the response from God will be to provide the answer or help we request.

As a grandfather with a lovely granddaughter, I really wanted to give her some tools to get through these difficult teenage years, as well as her life to follow with all of its attendant problems and trials. The best tool I could think to give her now was to teach her to ask for counsel from a broad group of individuals when she was faced with a major decision. And, along with that, I wanted her to remember that asking is free. It rarely costs anything to ask a question or ask for help. Beyond that, it can save us from learning painful and costly lessons.

We who are called by God have the greatest Counselor there is, and He is available to us in our needs at any hour. He will give us the aid we need to solve our problems. All we have to do is to ***ask, seek and knock*** .