

SERIES: YOUR BREAKTHROUGH TO HOPE
PART 5: TALKING TO YOUR FATHER

I am so excited to hear about the breakthroughs that are happening in your lives. Please feel free to send me your testimonies. I can read them, and if you want them kept anonymous just let me know. If it is a testimony you can share during our two services, I would like to see you do that. People's hopes are stirred and raised when they hear stories of how breakthroughs are happening. I have a testimony I want to read to you this morning (afternoon).

"Hey Scott! You were preaching right out of my situation this morning. As you know about 4 months ago, I was struggling with a nagging pain and couldn't muster the 'want to' I needed to change some comfort habits with soda, to the point I did actually pray your words to God... 'I can't change this on my own, I need You to help me... You're going to have to do it!' And as faithful as God is, I was diagnosed with an ulcer a couple weeks later. I had been underlining verses in the bookmark readings and noticed that almost daily they were references to healing. Even in my discipline, God allowed me to enjoy 2 trips that were planned over the holidays without incident. As I followed the treatment for the ulcer and claimed that to be healing, I still had the original nagging pain in my hip and right side. It was that day I read about Jacob wrestling with God when He reached out and touched the socket of his hip...so that it was wrenched, but Jacob refused to let go until God blessed him. And just before that, the verse where Jacob recognizes, 'I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness You have shown Your servant,' in G 32:10. With the unresolved pain, I continued to have peace but still pursued tests/appointments to determine the cause. The day I was driving home from a CT scan, I watched the cars toss spray from the recent rain on the road and suddenly the freeway was covered in rainbows....I began thanking God that not only was He going before me, and seeing me through, but He also knew what lay in the road ahead. Days later I received the result of a clear CT. I continued to come upon verse after verse that spoke of healing... **"Daughter, your faith has healed you."** Luke 8:48;

“Blessed is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her.” Luke 1:45; **“Woman, you are set free from your sickness.”** Luke 13:11. I believe God was saying to me I was healed from my physical issue but also from the bondage to comfort food. **“For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand...with a mighty hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”** Exodus 13:8, 14. I realized that I was now tired of planning days around doctor visits and wondering what test to do next, so on a walk/talk with God, I was motivated to pick up something I had put on the backburner, plans to start a series for the jr. hi/high school girls to discuss purity/maturity and God’s answers for their questions. Again the recent reading when Joseph named his son Ephraim “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering” Gen. 41:52. I know you see God’s hand in response to your obedience, and so have I but if there’s anything that increases faith it is seeing it confirmed in His Word and His promise...as I looked back over the scripture I underlined, the day I got my CT results back, the reading had been **“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today.” Ex 14:13.**”

She said she had a scope on Tuesday to see how well God has cleared up the ulcer...

“...and although I appreciate that the nagging issue in my hip is a reminder not to let go until God blesses me, I claim victory over this entire issue.”

She texted me Tuesday evening to let me know that the ulcers are completely clear. I love stories like this. She covered the majority of my points from last week. She focused on God and not her problem by reminding herself of God’s greatness, His unlimited power and His promises by reading through her Bible and her daily devotions with our bookmark. I bring this up because our process here that I am teaching you weekly really does work when you put it into practice. She has, and we’re all rejoicing in her important healing. For the rest of us who believe for our breakthroughs I want to talk with you today about how to talk with your Heavenly Father. This is what we call prayer. Prayer is having an ongoing conversation with God

throughout the day about your life and His purposes and plans for you.

Look at Matthew 6:7-9: **“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need before you ask Him! ⁹Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may Your name be kept holy.”**

Learning how to pray is incredibly important when your purpose is to experience breakthroughs to hope in situations that appear hopeless. It is curious that when you read through the Gospels the disciples of Jesus never once said, “Jesus, teach us how to do miracles. Jesus, teach us how to heal people. Hey, Jesus, teach us how to do spectacular things in life.” But in Luke 11:1 Jesus was in a certain place praying, and, as He was finishing, one of the disciples asked Him, “Will you teach us how to pray?” Prayer is all about learning how to connect with your Heavenly Father. Notice Jesus says when you pray to connect with your Heavenly Father you don’t have to babble like those in other religions. In religion people are taught that you have a better chance of having your prayers answered if you badger whoever you’re praying to with words repeated over and over and over. The word babble indicates a person who repeats the same words over and over without thinking. The priests of Baal continued from morning until noon, crying out, **“O Baal, answer us!”** The multitude in the theater at Ephesus in Acts 19:34 shouted for two hours, **“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.”** Jesus taught us that our Father is always ready to listen, but He cannot be manipulated through ritual prayer. This vain repetition and babbling to get God’s attention and to manipulate to get what we want is foolish because Jesus says you don’t have to do this because your Father know exactly what you need before you even ask Him. The reason God wants us to pray and to ask Him to intervene in our own personal lives and our culture and world is so that we in faith express our desires, our needs and our dependence on Him. This is a central theme in what is called the Lord’s Prayer, but it is better titled “the disciple’s prayer.” Long continued prayer is not improper, because Jesus Himself prayed through whole nights in Luke 6:12. He also commended in a parable the perseverance of the widow in prayer in Luke

18:1-8, and He repeated the same request in His prayer to the Father in the garden in Matt 26:44. One of the purposes of prayer is about changing us, our character, our will and our values as we seek God to respond. When you come to God in prayer you're coming to your Father who loves you, and He is here to protect, provide, care, guide and lead you.

The leading key to effective prayer is that we begin all of our prayers by addressing God as our Father. The term for father is "Abba," a name used by children for their earthly fathers that communicates warmth, intimacy and security of a loving father's care. In the future I want to do a series on the disciple's prayer, but today I want to look at with you Matthew 7:7-12--six verses that will give you confidence when you pray to your Father. This teaching today will help you deal with any sense of worry you might have when you go to pray. Please follow along as I read what Jesus said about prayer. ⁷**"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹You parents--if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ¹⁰Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! ¹¹So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him. ¹²Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets."**

I. God promises to answer me as I keep asking.

Matthew 7:7-8

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:25-34 that it is unnecessary to worry about the things we need in our lives because the Father knows our needs, and if we will seek His Kingdom, His purposes, plans and will above everything else and live righteous before Him Jesus says it is our Father's heart to give us everything we need. Not what we want, but what we need. Here Jesus builds on that the idea of seeking as Jesus says, "Keep on asking and you'll be

given what you ask for. Keep on seeking and looking and you'll find it. 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 is called the rule of three as a means of memorable communication. If you take in English the first letter of each word, **Ask, Seek, and Knock**, what does that spell? **ASK**. Another way to look at God's promise to answer you when you pray is that proximity to your Father makes the difference. **God invites us to an ongoing conversation with Him.**

- **When I'm near to my Father, I simply ask Him for what I need**

If I'm a little child and I'm at home, and my father is sitting there in the living room and I need something from him, I don't write him a letter or send him an email or call him, but I'm close or near to him and I simply ask him to meet my need. Asking God has to do with coming to my Father with humility and an awareness of my need just like a child comes to her father.

- **When I seem far from God, I must seek Him for what I need**

Sometimes you won't feel close to God. Using the child metaphor, if your father was somewhere in the house or outside or in the garage you would call out for him and then start your search until you find him. Dr. Wilkins writes in his commentary on Matthew "**Seek links one's prayer with responsible activity in pursuing God's will, as when a person prays for a job and at the same time checks out leads.**" You seek God's will and while you're doing what is responsible on your part you expect God to lead, guide and direct you.

- **When a barrier keeps me from seeing my Father, I must knock**

When like a child I'm in the room with my father, I simply ask Him for what I need. When I don't know where God is and He seems distant, I must seek Him. When there's a barrier between me and God, I knock. If I find out that my father is in his office and the door is shut what do I do? Do I give up? No! I begin to knock until he opens the door.

II. God will never give me anything that is not helpful for me. Matthew 7:9

This truth in vs. 9 will really help any of us that struggle with confidence concerning you not knowing what to pray for. You simply say to God, “I don’t know if this is good for me or not.” Jesus said, **“You parents--if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead?”** Of course not. God wouldn’t do that to you and you wouldn’t do that to your child. This is a laugh line in Jesus’ communication. His crowd would have been roaring with laughter. If your child asks you for some chicken, of course you’re not going to them a rock. But the opposite is also true. You ask God for something good, He is not going to give you something that is hurtful or bad for you. God is the ultimate arbiter on what is good for you. As you learn to trust His heart and His character you will grow in your confidence, especially when you need a breakthrough. Faith will surge in your heart.

III. God will not give me anything that would harm me

Jesus says in vs. 10, **“Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake?”** Of course not! Again we see the humorous side of Jesus. You ask for a fish, He is not going to give you a poisonous snake. Staple food in a Jewish daily diet included bread and fish. A responsible father would not be mean and trick his children with a stone that resembled bread, Jesus 1st temptation, nor would he be hurtful by tricking them with snakes that resembled fish. Here is the point, loved ones, and this is meant to help you to put away worry and fear and give you confidence when you come to your Heavenly Father. So if a responsible father will give his children precisely what they need on a daily basis, you can count on your heavenly Father who is absolutely trustworthy, will always give to His children, His disciples, His representatives what they really need to thrive. Isn’t that good news?

IV. God will only give to me what is best for me

Matthew 7:11

Jesus says, **“So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him.”** God is not a slot machine where you put in your prayer, pull the lever and you get whatever the slot machine gives you. God is not a vending machine. Some people treat God like the Aladdin’s lamp, you rub it, and the genie comes out and says, “Your wish is my command.” No, God is not my servant; I have the privilege of serving Him. Jesus says God is your Father in heaven. You can trust your Father in heaven. I want to encourage you to use the example of the praying hands I taught you two weeks ago. Many of you are and you’re seeing God respond to your prayers. This is very exciting. God will only give to me what is best for me, but I get to ask, seek and knock.

V. God wants me to give to others what I would like to receive from them

Matthew 7:12 **“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.”** This is known as the golden rule, but most people aren’t aware that it is connected to what Jesus has to say about prayer. This is especially true when it comes to praying for other people. What do you pray for other people? First you always stop and listen for what the Holy Spirit will show you. Many times after I have prayed for someone, if they didn’t tell me what they wanted me to pray for, often times they will say something like, “You prayed exactly what I was thinking,” or, “How did you know what to pray for like that?” I didn’t. The Holy Spirit led me. Last week a couple sought me out and said. “Pastor, will you please pray for us?” I said what I always say-- “What would you like me to pray for?” They said they’re daughter was put in a lottery to go to a certain school they wanted for her, and she didn’t get it, but one of the students who was picked wasn’t there so they had to do it all over again. They asked me to agree in prayer with them that she would get in. We agreed and on Thursday I received an email that told me their daughter was accepted into the school of their choice. God heard our prayers and answered them. It was easy for me to agree with them because #1 I believe the Scriptures that says when we pray He delights in hearing us.

They needed a breakthrough and I agreed. But I also know I have been through that with our children. When Benjamin applied to 9 schools for his PhD, the first 8 that responded to him said no. I told him we will stand firm in our belief, and he was selected to be in the PhD program at Hofstra. I just saw a video of him from LU, and as he was speaking, the title Dr. Ben Wood came across the screen. That was an answer to prayer.

This verse tells us how to pray for others because we know what we would need if we were in that person's situation. God wants you to treat others the way He treats you when you pray. Why is this so important? Because God wants us to be selfless not selfish. When you begin to pray for other people's breakthroughs, guess what's going to happen in your life? You will get the breakthrough you believe for.

Let's pray: God, we ask You to forgive us for not having enough faith in Your character and purpose that we come to prayer with fear, worry, anxiety and disbelief. We can get confused and have doubts that You truly love and care for us and that You want to answer our prayers. Jesus, we thank You for these five truths about Your character and Your desire to answer our prayers for the much needed breakthroughs we need in our lives. We believe this morning (afternoon) if we will keep asking, keep seeking and keep knocking that You will hear our prayers and answer them. Thank You that no matter what our relationship is to You, whether I feel close, distant or there's a barrier, You want us to ask, seek and knock. Thank You that You will never give us anything that is not helpful or that it will harm us. Thank You that You've given us what's best for us. So we can relax and not worry about whether You're going to answer us or not. Help us to give away what we want to receive so that You can continue to teach us that You want to answer our prayers, but even more than that You want us to be more like Jesus Christ.

If you're here this morning (afternoon) and you have never invited Jesus to be the Lord of your life you might want to say to Him right now, "Jesus Christ, come into my life. Make Yourself real to me. I want to get to know You better and to learn to trust You with my entire life. I want to learn to trust

You, love You and learn to talk to You all the time. I humbly ask this, my Father in Heaven, in Jesus' name.

Communion: Mark 14:23-25 “And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, ‘This is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many.’”