

## Discerning God's Will – Ask, Seek, Knock, Listen, Obey, Repeat

### Scripture Passages

**Romans 12:2** (HCSB) says: “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” The purpose of turning away from the gods of this age and renewing our minds is so that we can discern God's will for our lives.

### Luke 11:1-13

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

<sup>2</sup> He said to them, “When you pray, say:

““Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.””

<sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup> a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ <sup>7</sup> And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

<sup>9</sup> “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>11</sup> “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

### Knowing God's Will for My Life

As a Christian who is serious about my faith, one of the most critical things I need to know is God's will for my life. This is not just for the big decisions, like who to marry or what job to take; it is for all of life, even in the details. When I know and understand His will, which means I am taking the time to listen for the still, small voice of God, I feel empowered and I can walk out my faith in confidence. Of course, to receive the benefit of knowing God's will, I must surrender to His will. Knowledge without obedience is a dead end street and is one of the main things Jesus railed against during His ministry, especially with regard to the religious leaders of His day.

### The Lord's Prayer

In Luke 11, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. Perhaps the disciples had observed John's disciples praying and/or had observed Jesus in His routine communications with the Father and wondered if they might be able to learn to pray as well. It may seem like an odd request to us, as we might assume that everyone knows how to pray. But to the disciples, the “Lord's Prayer” (verses 2 - 4) would have been revolutionary. For starters, addressing Yahweh as “Father” would have been a real

head turner. We might imagine the disciples whispering to one another: “Did Jesus really just say that we can address God as ‘Father?’” It implies a personal relationship with God; something that would have been foreign to them.

The *Lord's Prayer* provides us with a model for prayer. In it Jesus addresses various themes: thanksgiving, adoration, worship, reverence, surrender, confession of sin, forgiveness of others, petition and deliverance. We could consider it to be a prayer template to be used as we address the Father. There were many things about the prayer that would have been instructional to the disciples, too many to address here. Suffice it to say that all of Luke 11:1-13 is in answer to the disciples request to teach them to pray.

### **Shamelessly Audacious Prayers – Ask, Seek, Knock**

In verses 5 - 8, Jesus tells a story about being “shamelessly audacious” in making a request to a friend, inferring that we are to do the same with God. What an awesome concept where Jesus is suggesting that we should approach the throne of God with confident expectation. What would our prayer lives be like if we took this seriously? How might it change our lives and the lives of those around us? How might it change the world?

Then, in verses 9 - 10, Jesus directly addresses the main topic of our discussion ... how to know God’s will. He says that we should ask, seek and knock, expecting a response from God. And, He just suggested in the prior verses that we should pray to God and pursue our relationship with Him with shameless audacity.

“Ask” means praying prayers of petition, asking God for things we need, which might include spiritual needs, physical needs and for direction or wisdom. Jesus addresses this in His prayer, for example, when He says: “Give us each day our daily bread.”

“Seek” is taking the next step and might include looking up Scripture passages that relate to our request, trying to gain Biblical perspective. We might also seek counsel from others. He says that those who seek will find.

“Knock” is taking action, by trying out different “doors;” e.g. applying for a job, trying out a Life Group, or inviting a neighbor over for dinner. As we knock, we may find that some doors open while others close.

As we ask, seek and knock, we will become more confident of His will for us. Consider an example where you are thinking about switching jobs. You have asked God for guidance, sought out counsel from others and Scripture, and applied for several jobs. And, as a result, God has given you a confident peace about a particular new job, knowing in advance that there is no perfect job to be had. A friend asks: “Are you *sure* taking that new job is the right thing to do?” And since one can never be absolutely sure that taking a new job is the right thing to do, you respond to your friend: “I am not *sure* that taking the new job is the right thing to do. However, I am *sure* that I am going to do it.”

One of the key benefits of taking the time to discern God’s will when making decisions in life is that when hard times come or disappointment arises as a result of making a decision (which happens at some point with most decisions), we can better endure the headwinds.

Take marriage for example. Let’s say that I choose a mate based on God’s guidance and my mate turns out to not be perfect and difficulties arise (which will surely happen). The question is not: “Did I marry the right person?” Instead of questioning my decision to marry my spouse, I find that my spouse is

*becoming* the right person because I am resting in the quiet confidence that God will see us through whatever difficulties we face.

### **The Gift of the Holy Spirit (Changes Everything)**

He ends His response to the disciples' request with a reminder that, compared to a human father, who knows to give good gifts to his son, God is infinitely more compassionate and knows exactly what we need and will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

Jesus gives them a model prayer, instructs them to be shamelessly audacious in their prayers, lays out the strategy of prayerfully asking, seeking, and knocking and ends with God's willingness to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks. The Spirit is the best of gifts; it is the power of God to do what we could never do on our own.

His willingness to give us a greater empowering through the Holy Spirit *changes everything*. The Spirit enables us to pray as we ought and we may find ourselves asking for the (humanly) impossible, and naturally drifting toward God's, and not our own priorities. It empowers us to pray in ways we would never consider. The Spirit is what empowers us to walk out Jesus' teaching on prayer. And, as we do this, we will find ourselves walking in confidence in God's will, his "good, pleasing, and perfect will."

### **Ask, Seek, Knock, Listen, Obey, Repeat**

So here's a mantra to consider: *ask, seek, knock, listen, obey, repeat, all in the power of the Holy Spirit*. We see in Luke 10 Jesus' encouragement to ask, seek, and knock. Jesus gives us a model on how to approach the Father in the Lord's prayer. All of this implies that we are listening to the voice of God as He speaks to us. We know that knowledge of God's will for our lives will be wasted if we do not act on what He is showing us. We repeat this process daily, as we walk out our faith journey. And, finally, all of this is merely wishful thinking and human thoughts without the gift of the Holy Spirit empowering us to be trained in righteousness and to become more and more like Jesus.

We live in a world where most people go their own ways. Proverbs 16:9 it says: "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps." As followers of Christ, we have available to us the Holy Spirit. We can ask, seek and knock, and the Lord, through his Spirit, will gladly establish our steps.

Who are you becoming?

### **Going Deeper Reflections**

See below for some thoughts on how to go deeper.

1. Consider an important life decision you are thinking about. Apply the "Ask, Seek, Knock, Listen, Obey, Repeat" approach to it.
2. Every day for the next week, first thing when you wake up in the morning (or during your quiet time or drive to work), prayerfully ask the Lord what thing He wants you to seek him about. Apply the "Ask, Seek, Knock, Listen, Obey, Repeat" approach to whatever He brings to your attention.
3. Pray some "shamelessly audacious" prayers this week. Ask God for some big things. See what happens!