

Luke 11:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

Analysis

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. This verse contains Jesus' famous threefold encouragement to persistent prayer. The emphatic "I say unto you" (kagō hymin legō, κἀγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω) asserts Jesus' authority to teach about prayer and to make promises about God's responses. Each command uses present imperative tense, indicating continuous, ongoing action: "keep asking," "keep seeking," "keep knocking." The verbs intensify in specificity and effort: asking involves verbal request, seeking requires searching, and knocking suggests urgent, determined petition.

Each promise uses the divine passive, indicating God as the actor: "it shall be given" (dothēsetai, δοθήσεται), "ye shall find" (heurēsete, εὕρήσετε), "it shall be opened" (anoigēsetai, ἀνοιγήσεται). These assurances are unconditional—Jesus doesn't say "it might be given" or "perhaps it will be opened," but declares certainty. The progression suggests increasing access: first receiving what is given, then discovering what is sought, finally gaining entrance to what was closed. The imagery moves from passive reception to active searching to entering intimate presence.

Theologically, this verse teaches several vital truths:

1. God invites and welcomes persistent prayer
2. prayer is not manipulation but relationship—we come as children to a Father

3. God's responses are certain, though timing and form may differ from expectations
4. prayer requires faith-filled persistence, not one-time asking
5. the greatest gift in prayer is not things received but access to God Himself.

The context (verses 5-8) emphasizes persistence through the parable of the friend at midnight, and the following verses (11-13) emphasize the Father's good character in giving.

Historical Context

This teaching appears in Luke's travel narrative (Luke 9:51-19:27) during Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem. The immediate context is the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1), prompting Jesus to give the Lord's Prayer (11:2-4), followed by this encouragement to persistent prayer. First-century Palestinian culture highly valued hospitality—the parable of the midnight friend (11:5-8) depends on cultural expectations that hosts must provide for guests regardless of inconvenience.

Jewish prayer tradition emphasized regular, structured prayers (morning, afternoon, evening) and included both individual and corporate prayer. The synagogue liturgy featured prayers of praise, confession, and petition. The Psalms modeled various prayer forms, including lament, thanksgiving, and intercession. Jesus builds on this tradition while emphasizing prayer's relational rather than merely liturgical nature. He teaches disciples to address God as "Father" (Abba, used in Mark 14:36), an intimate term not typical in formal Jewish prayer.

Early Christian practice embraced persistent, frequent prayer. Acts portrays the church as devoted to prayer (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 4:23-31, 12:5, 12). Paul commands, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). The early church's confidence in prayer stemmed from Jesus' promises like Luke 11:9 and His model of intimate communion with the Father.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between persistent, faith-filled prayer and vain repetition that Jesus elsewhere condemns (Matthew 6:7)?
2. How do the three verbs (ask, seek, knock) suggest different aspects or intensities of prayer?
3. What does Jesus' promise that 'it shall be given' teach about God's character and His desire to respond to His children?
4. How should believers understand this promise in light of prayers that seem unanswered or answered differently than expected?
5. In what ways does persistent prayer change the one praying, not just the circumstances prayed about?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ὕμῖν·	λέγω	αἰτεῖτε	καὶ	δοθήσεται	ὕμῖν·	ζητεῖτε
And	unto you	I say	Ask	and	it shall be given	unto you	seek
G2504	G5213	G3004	G154	G2532	G1325	G5213	G2212
καὶ	εὕρήσετε	κρούετε	καὶ	ἀνοιγήσεται	ὕμῖν·		
and	ye shall find	knock	and	it shall be opened	unto you		
G2532	G2147	G2925	G2532	G455	G5213		

Additional Cross-References

Mark 11:24 (Parallel theme): Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Matthew 21:22 (Parallel theme): And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

John 15:16 (Parallel theme): Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

John 15:7 (Parallel theme): If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

John 14:13 (Parallel theme): And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

1 John 3:22 (Parallel theme): And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

James 1:5 (Parallel theme): If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

Psalms 118:5 (Parallel theme): I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place.

Jeremiah 29:12 (Parallel theme): Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.

Hebrews 11:6 (Parallel theme): But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.