

# Principle of Prayer

by Adrian Rogers

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*Adrian Rogers emphasizes the irreplaceable role of prayer in the Christian life, outlining its reasons and the importance of persistence in seeking God's will.*

**Duration:** 34:26

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:7, Luke 11:5

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of persistent prayer. He uses the story of a man who goes to his friend's house at midnight to ask for three loaves of bread. Despite his friend initially refusing to help, the man persists and eventually receives what he needs. The preacher emphasizes that this story teaches us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking in prayer until we receive an answer from God. He also highlights that God desires to give good things to those who ask Him, and encourages believers to trust in the power of prayer.

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## Transcript

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And thank you for joining us in making an eternal difference. Now, there is, in the Christian life, no substitute for prayer. If you, in an accident, were to lose a leg, it's possible to be fitted for an artificial leg to replace a natural leg.

If you don't want to use a telephone, you can find a substitute. You can get a fax machine, or an email, or a female, or whatever you want to get to carry the message. You can get a substitute.

There is no substitute for prayer. Other things may be good and fine in themselves, but they're not a substitute. Eloquence is not a substitute for prayer.

Energy is not a substitute for prayer. Enthusiasm is not a substitute for prayer. Intellect is not a substitute for prayer.

There is no substitute for prayer. Prayer, in my estimation, is the greatest untapped, unused force in the universe. People are always trying to tap into energy.

Scientists have been looking at the energy of the ocean as the tides ebb and flow and the waves swell and think, somehow, could we tap that energy, or we have learned how to tap into the energy of nuclear power. But the greatest unused, untapped energy in the world is prayer. Now, let's look at the passage of Scripture, beginning here in Matthew chapter 7 and verse 7. These are the words of Jesus.

Jesus said them clearly and plainly, and we have no reason to doubt them, but we must believe them. Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find.

Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth. And to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.

Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? So we're going to put the message tonight in three easy divisions as we're thinking about the principles of prayer, and the very first is the reasons for prayer. Now, you know, I have pondered much in my life about the reason for prayer. Why does God want us to pray? Jesus taught very clearly and plainly, our heavenly Father knows what things you have need of before you ask.

Isn't that true? He already knows what we have need of, and he is infinite love. So why should we have to pray? Why should we have to tell him what we have need of, and why should we have to ask of him what he already wants to give us because he loves us? Have you ever thought about the mystery of prayer? Well, friend, why do we pray? Well, go back, if you will, to Matthew 6 for just a moment and look in verses 7 and 8. But when you pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard, for they are much speaking. Be ye not therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ask him.

After this manner therefore pray ye, our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Now, in these verses, we learn some things. First of all, we do not pray to God to impress him.

You don't have to be a junior size Shakespeare and pray in King James English. You don't have to be a poet and use flowery language. You do not pray to impress God.

Don't use vain repetition. Nor do you pray to inform God. Verse 8, your Father knows what things you have need of.

We pray not to impress God, not to inform God, but to invite God to work in our hearts and in our lives. Well, why should we invite God to do this? Well, let me give you three reasons. Number one, there is the, what I want to call the delight factor.

You see, God wants us to love him. God wants us to fellowship with him. God could run this universe without our prayers.

But if he ran this universe without our prayers, you and I would not have the privilege of working with him and fellowshiping with him and being with him as he administrates this great universe. So, over in John chapter 15, he spoke of himself as the vine, the Lord Jesus as being a vine like a grapevine. And he spoke of us as being branches.

And then he said in John chapter 15 verse 4, abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me. In a moment now, he's going to be talking to us about prayer.

But he's saying that the reason for this prayer is to get us to abide in him. We abide in him. He goes on to say, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, then you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.

Prayer is a way of God bonding us to himself. It is a way of causing us to dwell in him and he and us until we have the same kind of a union that a branch has with a vine. Now, we cannot do it without him.

He will not do it without us. Some time ago, a college called and said, can you come and be a speaker? I said, I would like to, but I cannot. I'm just sorry.

My schedule won't allow it. They said, well, if we'll send a pilot for you, would you come and speak? I said, well, I don't know. It said, well, we have a very fine pilot.

He pilots a jet aircraft and he can be there and pick you up. And I thought, well, fine, I will go. And so when I went out to the airport, it was a jet pilot, but it wasn't a jet airplane, coffee pot airplanes.

And so we got up there and we're flying over to this particular college where I'm going to speak. And this man says to me, do you know how to fly an airplane? I said, no, I don't. He said, would you like to fly this airplane? I said, yes, I would.

We're sitting side by side. He said, all right. Are those the pedals? Here's the controls.

Do this and do this. So we're sitting up there flying over Arkansas and I'm flying that airplane. I want to tell you, beyond a shadow of any doubt, peradventure, I could not have done that without that man for a very long time.

I could not have done it. He could have done it without me. I could not have done it without him.

But he gave me the privilege of flying that craft with him. And, you know, it was a lot of fun. It was an experience I still remember.

And while we were doing that, there was a bonding that was going on between the two of us that was very wonderful. We were having great fellowship as I was depending upon him, learning from him. And he was sharing his responsibilities and his duties with me.

And there that airplane goes. And I thought to myself, that's so very much like prayer. We can't do it without God.

God could do it without us. But when he allows us to cooperate with him, we have the thrill of helping God regulate this mighty universe. Prayer comes when we abide in him and he abides in us.

So there's what I call the delight factor. Then there's also the development factor. Did you know that prayer is one of the ways that we grow? We are developed in prayer.

In this same passage in John chapter 15 and verse 7, he says, If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, then you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. Sometimes we pray and the answer

doesn't seem to come. And so we begin to study the word of God.

We begin to seek the face of God. And we begin to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, until the answer does come. Some boy may have his eye upon a particular girl and want to date that girl and she won't date him.

And he asks her for a date and she says no. And he says, I wonder why she won't date me. Could it be my breath? So he takes a little bit more care of his dental hygiene.

And he asks her again for a date and then she says no. And he says, I wonder if it could be the way I groom myself. So he watches his fingernails and gets his hair cut and puts on a clean shirt.

Again, she asks him for a date and he asks her for a date and she says no. So he does something else. Maybe it's my manners.

Maybe it's the way I drink my soup. And so he changes that. And then one day he asked her for a date and she says yes.

The whole time he's been asking her, he has been improving, he's been growing. He's been getting more and more acceptable to her. And, you know, I think that's the way prayer is.

We ask God for something and the answer doesn't come and we ask again and we say, well, Lord, what? Could it be my selfishness in my life? Could it be my lack of faith? Could it be my lack of Bible study, my lack of commitment? And so prayer is not only a delight, it is a form of development. It helps us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. And then there's the dependence factor.

God never wants us to live independent of him. So if God were to do things for us without our praying, we would fail to have the dependence that a branch has upon a vine. In John chapter 15, verse 5, Jesus said, I am the vine, you are the branches.

He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. For without me ye can do nothing. It would be tragic if God were to run this universe and leave us out of it because we never know the delight of prayer.

We would never know the growth and the development that comes through prayer. And we would never know that dependence upon God, that bonding that comes through prayer. So whether we understand the philosophy of prayer or not, we know that our Lord has invited us and our Lord has commanded us to pray.

Now, not only the reasons for prayer, but let's look at the request in prayer. Notice what Jesus says in verse 7. Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find.

Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Now let's look at that. First of all, ask.

Just ask. We are commanded to ask God. Did you know that the great problem in prayer is not unanswered prayer, it is unoffered prayer.

James chapter 4 says very clearly in verse 2, you have not because you ask not. Jesus said we are to ask. Unoffered prayer is not merely a tragedy, it is a sin.

We are commanded to pray and ask God. Luke 18.1 says men ought always to pray. Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 14 verse 38, watch and pray.

Philippians chapter 4 verse 6 says be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God. In everything. Prayer ought to be as normal, as natural as breathing.

Paul said pray about everything. You say really everything? Well, if it concerns you, it concerns God. A good test of whether or not you ought to be participating in something or wanting something or attempting something is can you pray about it? Now if you cannot pray about it, if it's wrong to pray about it, then it's wrong to do it.

It's wrong to want it. Don't divide life up into the secular and the sacred. Don't say, well, I'll pray.

I'll pray when I'm preaching a sermon, but I won't pray when I'm fishing. Why not? Do you think it'd be wrong to pray when you go fishing and ask God to help you when you go fishing? I was fishing down in Florida some years ago and right at Cape Canaveral, out there on a sandbar with some buddies. I hadn't been fishing for so long.

I had a mirror lure and I had a spin casting outfit and I was away from my buddies. I was in water about up to my knees out there in the Florida sun and I could hear off in the distance other men catching fish. I wasn't catching any.

And I prayed. I said, Lord, I'm not catching any fish. These other guys are catching fish.

And I said, Lord, I've been working real hard. This is the only time I've gotten to go fishing in a long time. And, Lord, I'm going to ask you to let me catch a speckled trout, not a little one but a big one.

I prayed that prayer, Brother Jim, and threw that mirror lure over into a deep hole there in the sandbar. And it sank to the bottom and I twitched it and reeled it in a couple of times and I saw something about that big and yellow coming out of the water. It was a mouth of a great big speckled trout.

And he took that mirror lure and we wrestled it all over that sandbar. It was a great big fish. I mean, the biggest, listen, for me, the biggest speckled trout I'd ever caught.

He was a prize-winning trout. Now, folks, I had just prayed. I just said, Lord, I want to catch a big fish.

And I caught a big fish. You know what I did? I said, Lord, that was so great, I want to catch another one. So I said, Lord, let me catch another one.

And I cast and I caught another fish right after I prayed. I'd been fishing for a long time, not praying. I wondered, hey, why didn't I pray sooner? So I caught another one.

I didn't want to push it any further. I never prayed for another fish. I was afraid I might have to say, God, they ruined my illustration.

God doesn't answer all the prayers. But I was just so blessed. Now, you may think that's a little frivolous.

But, folks, I want to tell you something. None of us have any business doing anything that we can't pray about. I don't care what it is.

If you can't pray about it, you've got no business doing it. If you can't ask God for it, you have no business wanting it. The Bible says in everything by prayer and supplication.

Can you think of anything too big for God to handle or anything too small for God to notice? You think about it. In everything by prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And so we are to ask.

You say, well, what about if I want the wrong thing? You even ought to pray about that. You ought to say, God, I'm wanting the wrong thing. Help me.

Fix my want. No matter what it is, carry it to God in prayer. Our responsibility is the asking.

God's responsibility is the giving. But he cannot do his responsibility unless we do ours. So our Lord says ask.

But not only does he say ask, look at that verse again. He also says seek. So not only should there be a desire, there needs to be a discernment.

And you say, what do you mean by a discernment? Well, when you're seeking, think with me now. When you're seeking, there's something that you don't see. Or there's something you don't know.

You're on a quest. If you're seeking something, it's lost or unknown. And so you're trying to get some things figured out.

You're trying to find something. You're trying to discover something. And prayer is not only a matter of desire where we ask, but it's a matter of discernment where we seek.

Now, what we might be seeking? The purpose of God. Did you know we might be praying out of the will of God. And the only thing that lies outside the reach of prayer is that which lies outside the will of God.

Remember James 4, verse 2? You ask and receive not because you ask amiss. If you're asking for the wrong thing, God's not going to bless you. God's not going to give it to you.

Maybe it might be that you're selfish in your motivation. You ask amiss that you might consume it upon your lust. I can ask for personal needs, but I can't ask for selfish needs.

It may be just God Himself that He wants me to seek. Maybe before God gives me what He wants, He wants me to want Him more than I want the thing I'm asking for. And so, He says also in that same 4th chapter of James, in verse 8, He says, Draw nigh to God, and God will draw nigh unto you.

So, it may be that God wants me just to draw nigh to Him and to seek Him. To get away from my frivolous, half-hearted, giddy prayers. God does business with those that mean business.

It may mean that God wants me to seek the power of God that comes through purity. For He goes on to say in James chapter 5, verse 16, The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. But we are, look, there's the desire that asks.

There's the discernment that seeks. As I pray, I say, Lord, what is it? How do you want me to pray? What do you want me to find? But now watch it. Desire, discernment, now watch this, determination.

Ask, seek, knock. Knock. Well, what do you knock on? You knock on a closed door.

The door is closed. And when you pray, you have to keep on praying until that door opens. There are barriers that we have to overcome when we pray.

And actually, this verb is in the present tense. What it literally means is keep on knocking. Keep on knocking.

Sometimes God's answers are direct. You ask God for something and He gives it to you just like that, ipso facto. We've all had that to happen to us.

Sometimes God's answers are different. We ask for one thing, He gives us something else. But sometimes God's answers are denied.

We ask for something and God says, No, that's bad for you. I don't want you to have it. Are you asking for the wrong motive? Sometimes we ask and God's answers are delayed.

And that's what I'm talking about right now. We have to knock and we have to keep on knocking. Now, folks, this is kind of hard to understand, but it is a Bible truth, so we're going to slow down here just a little bit on this thing of knocking.

Keep on knocking until you get the answer. Look with me, for example, in Luke chapter 11. Turn to this one.

Luke chapter 11, verse 5. Jesus here is talking about prayer. His disciples said in Luke 11, verse 1, Lord, teach us to pray. So the subject here is prayer.

Now go down to verse 5. And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not.

The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot rise and give thee. Now, do you get the picture? Here's a man who is knocking on the door.

He's knocking on his neighbor's door. He's knocking on his friend's door. He's knocking on the door of somebody who knows him and loves him.

And he says, I have a need. I've got an unexpected guest. The cupboard is empty.

I would be embarrassed if I did not feed this friend. I need three loaves of bread, and I need them now. But notice what happens here.

Verse 7. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not. The door is now shut. By the way, let me say that may not seem much to you.

The door is now shut. But in those days, locks were very complicated. It was not easy to unlock a door.

Locks were complicated, and my children are with me in bed. Everybody didn't have separate bedrooms. They all slept more or less in the same bedroom.

To get up would wake up the baby, cause everybody to get up. And there were sometimes animals and so forth kept in the same house with the people. The livestock might wake up.

The neighbors' dogs start barking. He says, Look, I'm not going to do this. Just be quiet.

You're waking the neighborhood. I'm not going to do it. But notice verse 8. But I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, that is his urgency and his persistency, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

Now watch this now. 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. That's the same verse that we're using over here in Matthew. You ask.

That's desire. You seek. That's discernment.

And you knock. That is determination. Now, whether you agree with it or not, whether you understand it or not, friend, you've got to knock on heaven's door, and you've got to keep on knocking sometimes to get those prayers answered.

Now, you're in Luke chapter 11. Just turn to Luke chapter 18. Let me show you the same thing.

Let me hear the pages turn. Luke chapter 18. Begin here in verse 1. And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, now watch this, and not to faint.

The word here means not to quit praying. So many times we pray, we knock once, we rattle the doorknob, the voice within says go away, and we just go away. But he doesn't want us to go away.

He wants us to keep on knocking, keep on asking. And men ought always to pray, not to faint, saying, there was in a city a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man. Sound like some I know.

And there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while. But afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming, just underscore that, by her continual coming she weary me.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith, and shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them. You say, Pastor, why does God stay in bed and not get up and open the door right away? Why does God not avenge me of my adversary right away? Because God does business with those that mean business, and Jesus said we are to keep on knocking, for whatever reason. We need to understand that the Bible says, Therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious unto you.

Let me give you another example of this same thing, of this determination. In Matthew chapter 15, we won't turn to that, but in Matthew chapter 15, many of you remember the story of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman. Jesus was there to dinner.

This woman came and said to Jesus, Master, have mercy on me. My daughter has a demon. She's grievously vexed with a demon.

And Jesus said, I've been sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. You're a Syrophenician woman. You're a pagan.

Get away. I can't take the children's bread and give it to dogs. Now, how would you feel? How would you feel? I mean, you've got a demon-possessed girl.

You come to this one who's supposed to be the Savior and the Lord of the universes, this one full of compassion. And he says, hey, dog, get away. I've just come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

I don't have anything for you. You're an outcast. What would you do? You know what she said? She said, you're exactly right.

She said, I don't deserve anything. But she said, you know, the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the table. And Jesus said, woman, great is your faith.

And he gave her exactly what she asked for. You say, why are you comparing God to a selfish neighbor? Why are you comparing God to an unjust judge? Why are you comparing God to a bigoted person? You don't understand what the Scripture is about here, folks. Jesus is not saying God is an unjust judge.

Jesus is not saying that God is a selfish neighbor. Jesus is not saying that God is a respecter of persons. But what the Bible teaches is that we need to press through in prayer.

We need to ask. Many times we have not because we ask not. And then we need to seek, not only desire but discern.

Is there something God's trying to teach us? Is there some key to this puzzle that we don't need? And then once we ask and once we seek, then we knock and we knock and we keep on knocking. Let me give you another example. In 1 Kings chapter 18, Elijah has prayed and he shut up heaven.

And it would not rain on the earth for a number of years. And then God tells Elijah, you go tell Ahab that it's going to rain. Now I'm going to pick up the reading here.

You can turn to it if you want to. In 1 Kings chapter 18, beginning in verse 41. And Elijah, he's an Old Testament prophet, said unto Ahab, he's an Old Testament king.

Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain. By the way, it not rained a drop when he said this. Not a drop.

So Ahab went up to eat and drink and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. That's a mountain. I've been on top of Carmel sometimes.

Our friends here just from the Holy Land. I don't know whether you went to Haifa or not. Did you go to Haifa? That's where Mount Carmel is.

And he went up to the top of Carmel and he cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees and said to his servant, go up now and look toward the sea. And he went up and looked and said, there's nothing. And he said, go again seven times.

Now here is a man who already knows, he's been told of God that it's going to rain. But he prays once, twice, thrice, four times, five times, six times, seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time that he said, behold, there riseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand.

And he said, go up and say to Ahab, prepare thy chariot and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. Why didn't God send the rain the first time? I don't know, but he didn't do it. I mean, and he had promised that he was going to send the rain.

But he had to ask seven times. Delays are not denials. And we just can't pick God's blessings for the ripe.

God has the right time. I don't know when it is. Did you know that the Lord Jesus Christ himself knocked on heaven's door? Would you think that Jesus' prayers, because he was the son of God in the flesh, had his prayers answered automatically? I was shocked when I really considered this scripture today.

But in Matthew chapter 26, verse 44, and he left them and went again and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Did you think about that? Jesus. Jesus.

I said Jesus prayed the third time with the same words. There's a mystery here, folks. But there is also a truth, whether we understand the mystery or not, and that is we are to keep on knocking.

Ask, seek, and knock. Well, Pastor Rogers, does there come a time when you stop knocking? Sure. When the door opens.

Sure. When you have what you asked for. Or when you have the assurance in your heart.

If you don't have it in your hand. Or if God tells you no. Paul, the mighty apostle, had something that he wanted.

He said, I asked God for it three times. And on the third time, God said to me, no. I'm not going to give you what you're asking.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 8, For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me. But God said to Paul, Paul, listen. I'm not going to take it away.

I'm going to give you added grace. So Paul stopped knocking then. He didn't pray the fourth time.

When do you stop? When the door opens, you have what you ask. Or when you have it in your heart and God has given you the assurance. About six years ago, God told me that he heard a prayer from me.

I had been knocking. As a matter of fact, I had been kicking the door some. And saying, God, I've got something on my heart.

And I want to remind you about it. And I prayed again and again and again and again. And God said to me, I've heard your prayer.

You can stop asking. I didn't have the answer in my hand, but I had it in my heart. And God had heard my prayer.

But folks, listen. There is a desire that you ask. There is a discernment that you seek.

There is determination that you knock. Many of us, I believe, do not press through in prayer. Let me say something about this knocking here for just a moment.

You could, in a sense, say that God answers every prayer. Sometimes the answer is yes. If you ever ask God for something, just ask him for it and he just gave it to you.

Just like you ask him for it. Let me see your hand. That's it.

All of us say, God, I know. And he says, okay. He does that enough, we know.

And the answers to prayer are so clear that we say, hey, this could not be. This could not be a coincidence. It is unmistakably an answer to prayer.

And I would not bore you or draw this out by telling you times when I have just asked and received, and in no way possible in my humble but accurate opinion, that it could have happened any other way except a direct answer to prayer. Sometimes the answer is yes. Sometimes the answer is no.

God says, you're asking for something wrong. I'm not going to give it to you. Sometimes the answer is wait.

I'm going to give it to you, but you just have to wait on me. I'm developing you. And sometimes God is giving us not what we ask for, but he's giving us something better than we ask for.

Well, here's a final thing. Now, look, I've talked to you about the reasons for prayer. I've talked to you about the request for prayer.

Now let me talk to you about the reward of prayer. Go back, if you will, to our scripture where we began in Matthew 7 and look at the reward of prayer. How do we know that God is going to answer this prayer? Well, he tells about his nature, beginning now in verse 8. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Friend, if you will ask in faith, if you will seek discerningly, and if you will press on through, your prayer is going to be answered. And then Jesus illustrates it again, what a great teacher Jesus was. Or what man is there of you whom if his son asks bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Now, why can we be so assured that God's going to answer our prayers? Because God is good.

Notice the logic of Jesus. If evil men, if evil men will take care of their children, how much more shall a good God answer the prayers of his children? And not only is God good, but God is wise. God is not going to give you something that you don't, that would harm you.

God's not going to give you stones if we ask for bread. And thank God he's not going to give us stones if we ask for stones. He's going to give us what we want.

God is wise and God is love. He calls him our Father who is in heaven. So let's remember to come to God in prayer just to keep on praying and to keep on asking.

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Thank you, and may God richly bless you.

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