

"HOW TO HAVE A PERFECT SUMMER" MATTHEW 7:7-14

Since this is the first Sunday of the summer, I want to reflect on how we might plan to have the most exciting summ-summ-summertime! And since it is the longest day of the year, does that mean that I can have twice as long for this message! I thought not!

This is the season of rest and relaxation, a time for renewing from a strenuous springtime. What are you planning? For some it will be the familiar water spots, the lake, the ocean, the pool, somewhere to cool off..... for others it may be the BIG planned trip that you have been waiting for, for still others it is reunion, or a traveling ball team, or even a time for recovery from that surgery that just couldn't be put off any longer! Whatever it is, it is break-time, and recreation is what we Americans do best!

Grab a friend, a fishing pole, a bathing suit, a good read.....A GOOD SUMMER READ....now that's our standard diversion, something to take our minds off the daily grind. In this time of rest and renewal we have an opportunity to explore some new ideas. It is UNWINDING we are seeking during summertime!

The New Testament asserts what the Old Testament always claimed was true: God wants His children to have fullness of life, abundant life, life eternal. It is not to be postponed to any sweet-by-and-by. *This is life eternal*. This is new life, God's gift. How do we reach for it this summer? Jesus' first and most extensive preaching was out on the hillsides where he often went for retreat. There he preached a simple answer

Ask! Seek! Knock!

He offered 3 major truths of the 'Good News about God', which are that God is (1) PERSONAL, (2) ACCESSIBLE, directly to all of us, and (3) A LOVING FATHER. That is the heart of Christian

faith; it is not good advice, it is *good news*, THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD.

We have to be careful here not to assume that God runs the world like an average family, or that the consequences to ignoring his provisions and offers can be evaded with a childlike appeal. As we know from the cross of Jesus, God's Fatherhood means an outgoing and sacrificial love. We know that for the times we resist God's authority, and when we behave half-heartedly toward our brothers and sisters, God's love can be severe. "...If you do not forgive others their wrongs, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). There is love and every provision with God, and there is judgment consistent with His Holiness.

'**Ask, Seek, and Knock**' were and still are common terms offered as ways that children always relate in the family. We ask for our daily needs because we are dependent, we seek out those provisions that we are assured are provided, and we knock at the door of every opportunity. It is 2 sided! God gives, or reveals, since all is His to give, and we must reach out, and receive what is so graciously offered. Our faith is always a double quest, a revelation from God's side, and a discovery from our side.

It has been a long history of our progressive discovery of God. Now Jesus has brought us to know this: *God is our Heavenly Father*, who graciously gives to us "*all and more than we need or imagine*," as Paul said in amazement. James said in equal amazement, our problems are simple, "*We have not, because we ask not!*" I like Eugene Peterson's translation in The Message, "*This is not a cat and mouse game! Just ASK for what you need!*"

As God is Personal, God has made each of us personal, which means we are able to come into touch with Him in such a way that we may lay our needs before Him and receive His help!

We cannot have fellowship with a principle, or a process, or some life force! We don't need to apply to some subordinate somewhere. Although many saints and prophets have drawn closer than we dare and helped us to find God's power, beauty and assurance, nevertheless we may go straight to headquarters! We can **ASK! SEEK! And KNOCK!** We can bring our needs, every single one with confidence. We can search out expectantly and confidently the volume of answers and provisions with which God has filled the world. And we can knock at the waiting doors on all the avenues of grace as we are faithful to trust Him and simply receive. We must **ASK!** Then **SEEK! and KNOCK!** We must **pray**, and **expect**, and then **reach** forth and **receive**.

I believe you will be inclined to pick up dozens of books of summer reading material...Clancey, Grisham, Barbara Bradford Taylor, Danielle Steele, or Jan Karon's latest tale of the easy-going priest of Boone, North Carolina, or 3 Cups of Tea, maybe Tim Russert's book about his Dad. Or have you seen the latest one getting rave reviews called, THE SHACK? It is supposed to be the Pilgrim's Progress of our generation! Any number of them will make your summer sizzle!

But I want to urge you to read Jesus' simple invitation to reach out to God again in simple trust, to reach forth for the renewing of your heart, and possibly the revitalization of your talents and visions, your energies, your love of God and others. What can it mean for **YOU** to come alive again to all that God has planned for you and for your abundance of life? What can it mean for your home and family if **YOU** are renewed in faith and simple confident trust in God? Here's the formula Jesus tells us:

1. Asking means praying, and asking in the unselfish spirit of Jesus for the right things means we will receive God's best. God who is unlimited love can only give us His best when we sincerely

want the best! Harmon was a star athlete, but he quit the team because he didn't want his father's teaching. His father, Brent, sadly confessed he couldn't coach any young athlete who made it clear that he didn't want him to teach him.

God longs to give all His children good gifts, but God will not force the gifts on any of us. *"Ask and it shall be given to you."*

2. Seeking out God is necessary to know who God is. I see among Christians today a great temptation to become virtual agnostics. What I mean is, when we become lazy in our spiritual lives, expecting church to do it for us weekly, being satisfied with paying our dues in this way, and busily go about our interests and well planned lives on our own, as if God's will is out of reach- or His voice too difficult to decipher- we become walking doubters. Agnostics never really deny God, they simply act like they don't know!

Jesus' calls us to the God who never turns away from us. God takes the initiative, but we must respond by our seeking with genuine anticipation and a real dose of faith and expectation. *"Seek and you shall find!"*

3. Third and last, is what Jesus calls Knocking! A

distinguished preacher of another generation made this come to life for me. Dr. Morrison, once pastor of the Wellington Church of Glasgow, Scotland was a pastor who set the pace for constantly visiting his people. He kept up this commitment, even when he was failing in years. Since many of his people lived in the old 4 storied tenements, he would climb the flights of stairs and often stop on the way up to catch his breath. He would go to an unknown door and knock. As they opened, he was welcomed in for a brief respite, a short rest. He said he was never refused.

When he lay dying he remembered that and whispered, "There is always an open door, and I know there is one waiting for me now." He was knocking on Heaven's door!

Most all of us find that life has slammed many doors in our faces. Someone has been taken from us when we could hardly bear it. It reverberated like an iron door when some of our greatest joys or hopes were denied. But God is behind every open and closed door, opening to us a way of escape from loneliness, from grief, from bitterness, from defeat. All we need to do is KNOCK, that we may enter into a future of further opportunity, greater service, of a richer, fuller life.

Dr. Chester Swor was a great inspiration to the students at Mississippi College where he was a campus Chaplain. Birth defects had left him with a twisted torso barely able to walk. Yet he did walk with great effort. As a child I wrote in my Bible one of his memorable quotes, "*Faith knows no despair. It is a word that is unknown to a Christian.*"

We all have many uphill roads we will face come September's returning rush. We need the rest that will revitalize us for next fall. How will you spend your summer? Where will you seek out your renewal, and what will you be looking for? Will you be asking, seeking and knocking on the doors, ready to receive with confidence?

Jesus said we need only ASK! SEEK! And KNOCK! God is ready to answer all our deepest needs.

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