

## WHEN WE PRAY, WHAT SHALL WE ASK?

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

“Ask, and it will be given to you.” That is the emphatic message of the Gospels (Matthew 7, Luke 11). Our heavenly Father promises that He will give good things “to those who ask him.”

What shall we ask? One who faced this question was Solomon of old. God said to him, “Ask! What shall I give you?” This set in motion a sequence of thoughts in the mind of Solomon, which resulted in a humble speech. “And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing” (1 Kings 3: 10).

You or I might pause in trying to choose what to ask of God. Casual wants might come to mind only to be discarded as not appropriate in a petition to God. It is notable that God observed with favor what Solomon did *not* ask. He did not ask for long life for himself nor for riches nor for the death of his enemies.

He asked for something that would enable him to serve people wisely. And it is remarkable that he did not refer to them as his people. He saw them as God’s people, and he felt like a mere child contemplating the task of serving them well.

Solomon asked for a wise and understanding heart. Virtually everyone knows what is called “the serenity prayer.” It’s about things we can change and things we can’t change, a prayer ending with the request for wisdom “to know the difference.”

Since we may not always be wise in what we ask, it is good to conclude our petition with the prayer that God’s will shall be done and not our own. Here is the way this is put by theologian Emanuel Swedenborg:

“In prayer, when inspired by God, there is always the thought and belief that the Lord alone knows whether what is sought would be beneficial or not. Therefore the one who prays leaves the Lord to decide whether to listen to what he asks for, then accordingly pleads that the Lord’s will may be done, not his own, in keeping with the Lord’s words uttered in Gethsemane.” *Not my will, but yours.*

While I am quoting from my own theological orientation, I would add something about a prayer which I understand is always granted. We pray for help in overcoming our own shortcomings and evils.

That prayer, according to Swedenborg, resonates with the will of God. We ask for help, and “this is not denied to anyone, but is granted to all; for the Lord is in the continual effort, from His Divine love, to reform and regenerate man, and so to purify him from evils. And when the man also wills and intends it, this perpetual effort of the Lord becomes an act” (*Doctrine of Charity* 203).

Start by saying, “Lord, help me to....” Say those words slowly and see what sincere things come from your heart and into your prayer. There are things far better than selfish ambitions. They may have to do with changes you would make in your life and character. God has the power. If you really want it and are willing to do your small part, then ask and keep asking. As the Bible says, pray and do not lose heart.

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