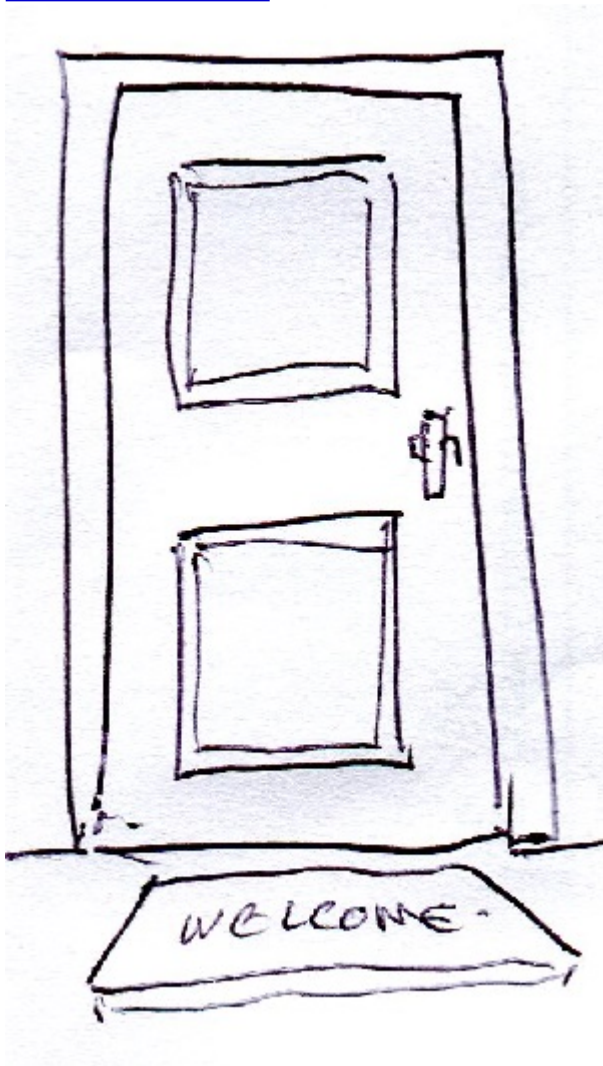


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by Pat Marrin

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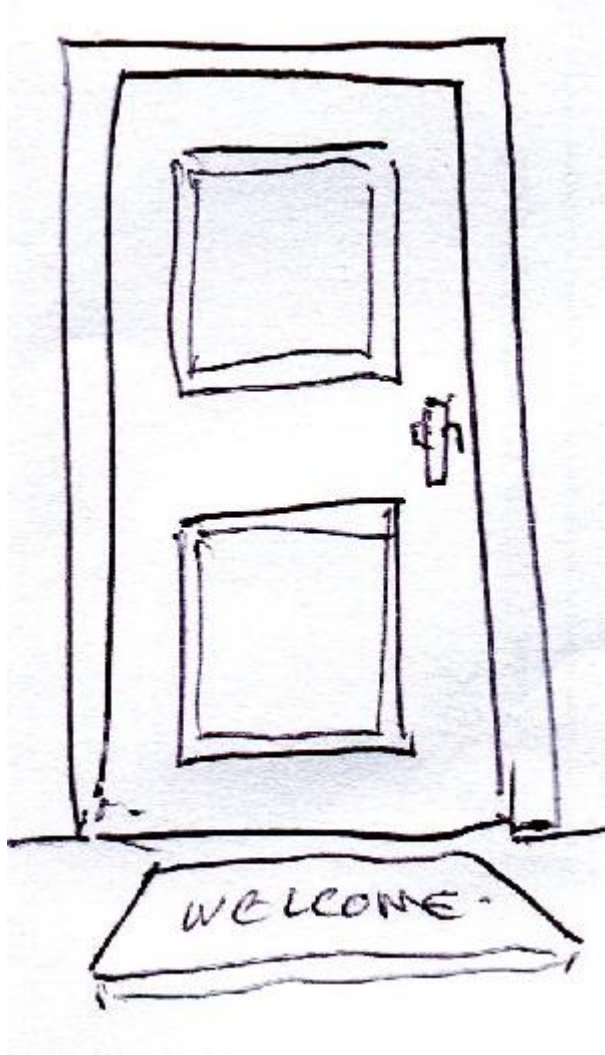
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“Ask and it will be given to you...” (Matthew 7:7).

Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Matt 7:7-12

Today’s reassuring words on the efficacy of prayer follow Jesus’s instruction on praying the “Our Father.” Once we acknowledge this intimate relationship with the *Abba*, Jesus wants us to assume that our prayers will be heard and answered. His comparisons to earthly parenting are convincing: What father would give his son a stone when he asked for bread, or a snake if he asked for an egg? Human parents sometimes fail, but how much more reliable is a heavenly Papa or Mama?

Much has been written about prayer, including theories about unanswered prayers. One reason people are reluctant to pray specifically is because they are not sure

how literally they should take Jesus' instructions. Prayer is not magic or simple *quid pro quo*, and God help us if we got everything we asked for, like quick fixes and cheap graces, or things that would harm us or others. Discernment is required, and if we read Jesus' words carefully, we see that he describes prayer as a process, not a simple transaction.

Asking, seeking and knocking are the first stages in a movement within us that gets us to explore our own prayers as we turn to God in a time of need. Any parent who deals with a child's question knows that it becomes a dialogue about what they want and why. The original wish often evolves into a deeper want. More than food, a child wants constancy, to trust that they will be provided for. More than a toy, a child wants someone to play with them, to enter their world. The dialogue helps the relationship grow, even as prayer deepens our exploration of who God is for us.

Knocking is about openness, responsiveness. In a time of frustration, we feel like doors are closed. To knock is to summon help from the other side of that door, and which door we choose to approach is the first movement in faith. Many doors will remain closed, but not God's. Jesus promised his disciples that if they knock, God will open the door, invite them in and listen to their needs. Again, prayer is about deepening a relationship, and the first answer we receive is the relationship itself. To know God and experience God's love is the ultimate benefit of prayer.

Disciples have been called seekers. Young people are natural seekers because everything they want is up ahead in a life just beginning. Parents who are anxious over children who haven't decided should be glad they are seekers, even if they don't make God their focus. Searching is itself a prelude to prayer. We are works in progress, and there is something wonderful and adventurous to carrying unfinished prayers that draw us forward, shape our expectations, ask us to lean out and long for things we cannot name yet, like love and purpose and holiness. They lead to a face-to-face encounter with God, our source and destination, the Answer to all our prayers.

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