

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Matthew 7:7-11 2016 ESV

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

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We come to a brief passage about prayer, and like many passages about prayer, it has been misunderstood and misapplied. “Ask ... seek ... knock ... and you’ll have what you want given to you.” We all know that prayer doesn’t work that way, by our own experience as well as by common sense. If all that was required for answered prayer was faith and passion and determination, then the most heartbreaking circumstances would have been interrupted by miracles. The worse the circumstance is, the more we understand our need, and the greater fervency we put into our prayers. But asking and seeking and knocking fails as a simple, get-what-you-want formulaic prayer. And that’s because it isn’t that kind of a prayer. It’s far more meaningful, and far more significant.

How are we to understand what Jesus means here? How do these words encourage and build faith, rather than discouraging and undermining it? We need to keep it in its context, seeing it in light of what came before, as well as what comes after.

THE CONTEXT OF ASK/SEEK/KNOCK

The context for these verses is the entire Sermon on the Mount. Let’s turn back to [Matthew 5](#).

The Sermon on the Mount is a teaching given to His disciples ([Matthew 5:1-2](#)).

He begins with the Beatitudes ([Matthew 5:2-12](#)), descriptions of what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ.

In [Matthew 5:13-16](#) Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth; we are necessary for the world to see the light of Christ, and experience His grace and mercy.

In [Matthew 5:20](#) Jesus tells us that our righteousness must exceed that of the most outwardly righteous people of that time – the scribes and the Pharisees.

In the remainder of [Matthew 5](#) Jesus explains the full weight of the Law of God. Anger is murder; lust is adultery. And in [Matthew 5:48](#) He commands us to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

In [Matthew 6:1](#) Jesus commands us to live solely for the glory of God, unconcerned and uninfluenced by the attitudes of those around us. This is true regarding our financial giving, our prayer, and our fasting.

In [Matthew 6:19-24](#) we are to treat our finances and possessions in the same way, storing up treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth. This is not a minor point; the reverse amounts to idolatry.

In [Matthew 6:25-34](#) Jesus commands us not to be anxious about the necessities of life, but seek God's Kingdom and God's righteousness first, and what we need for life will be provided for us.

In [Matthew 7:1-5](#) we are commanded to not dare to judge others as God judges, but to be far more concerned with our own sins than the sins of others.

In [Matthew 7:6](#) we are commanded to exercise discernment and recognize those who are spiritually unclean – Jesus calls them “dogs” and “pigs” – and refuse to give them holy and precious things, which they will only trample, before attacking us for giving them.

As we skimmed through those chapters was there anything that stood out to you as difficult, or next to impossible, or intimidating? Something should have, you know. In fact, most of it should. The Sermon on the Mount is not an easy, tidy, pleasing list of guidelines for a pleasant life. It is a direct frontal attack on the ways of our world, the very ways that come so easily to us. So, is there something you wish Jesus hadn't said? Anything that dampens your hope, or perhaps even frightens you?

This is the preceding context for our passage today. [Matthew 5:1-7:6](#) is why Jesus spoke [Matthew 7:7-11](#).

THE NEED FOR PRAYER

Matthew 7:7-8 2016 ESV

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Nothing in the Sermon on the Mount comes from natural ability, or the right kind of personality. None of it can be taught from a pulpit, or described in a book. You can't learn about it on YouTube or Facebook. These things are foreign to the world in which we live.

Jesus tells us to pray, to long for an answer, and to look to God the Father for that answer.

We need to ask the Father to grant us what we lack. In [Matthew 6:8](#) Jesus tells us that our Father knows what we need before we ask. He knows that we need food and shelter and clothing. And He knows that we need more important, spiritual things as well. We need to **ask** the Father for what we need.

We need to seek what we lack. We aren't meant to offer up a quick, one-time prayer – “Father, help me be perfect as You are perfect” – but to chase after what we need from the Lord, to remain in prayer about it. The Sermon on the Mount describes what our lives in Christ should be like; if there is something that we are missing, we should keep after it in prayer until it is given to us.

And we need to go to the Father – knocking on His door – for these things. We don't just send up prayers into the sky, hoping someone somewhere will pick up on them and make them happen. We go to our Father in heaven, and as Him, seeking what we need from Him, knocking on His door until one of two things happen: He grants our request, or we die.

Listen to what Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote about our verses today:

Those foolish people who think of Christianity only in terms of a little morality which they themselves can produce have never really seen it. The standard by which we are confronted is that found in the Sermon on the Mount, and by it we are all crushed to the ground and made to realize our utter helplessness and our desperate need of grace. Here is the answer; the supply is available, and our Lord repeats it for the sake of emphasis.

THE HOPE OF AN ANSWER

Matthew 7:7-8 2016 ESV

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

The promise has been made. Our need has been made clear by the Lord Jesus from the Beatitudes to this place. We are to ask for what we need, seek it, knock for it, and trust that the Father will give us what we need.

If you are like me – and I fully accept that you might not be – then more often than not you feel the weakness of your faith, and the shallowness of your devotion. You know how easily you can be discouraged; you know how little weight it takes to burden your heart and soul; you know how easily your contentment in Christ can give way worry.

I go to **ask** the Father for what I need, I **seek** what I lack from Him, I **knock** on His door in such faith as I have – but how will He respond to me?

We looked at the previous context; now we need to look to the following context.

OUR GOOD FATHER

Matthew 7:9-11 2016 ESV

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Since Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, we can trust what He says. Our Father in heaven is a Good Father, who delights to give His children good things when they ask. He may not give those things immediately; we must seek and knock. But He knows how to give good things to His children.

Jesus uses US as an example. If our son asks for bread, we don't give them a stone. Bread was a staple food in that time, as it is now. Small rolls baked in ovens would resemble small stones. Eels caught in the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River would resemble snakes. A good parent would never be so cruel as to give their child a stone when they asked for bread, or a snake when they asked for a fish.

How much more is this true with our Father in heaven? When we ask Him for a good gift – strength in persecution, or the ability to give rightly – He will give us that gift. When we ask for what we need to do His will, He will give it to us.

In fact, I think that God deliberately withholds some things from us, so that we will learn to come to Him and ask, and see His loving character in action. What is it that you need to live in faith and obedience? What is it that you need to live for His glory and pleasure? Ask Him! Seek it! Knock on His door! He will give you what you need to live according to the Sermon on the Mount; He is a good, good Father.

OUR WISE FATHER

Let's think about this picture of bread and stones and fish and snakes a little more.

Matthew 7:9–11 2016 ESV

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

But what if the child points to a stone, confuses it with bread, and asks for it? What if the child points to a snake, confuses it with a fish, and asks for it? What does a good parent do then?

We recognize what the actual need is, and we meet that need, rather than answering our child's specific request. If our child asks for a stone, we give them bread. If our child asks for a snake, we give them fish.

Children don't always know what they want; a good parent gives them what they need.

I'm reminder of [Romans 8:26-27](#),

Romans 8:26–27 2016 ESV

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home today, into our lives.

If I need righteousness, or freedom from inner anger, or the ability to pray as the Father desires me to pray, and I ask the Father to give me that good thing, will He give me an evil thing instead? No. He will give me what I need, according to His perfect knowledge.

But what if my prayer for righteousness is really a prayer for self-righteousness? What if my prayer regarding anger is really a prayer to feel better about my sin? What if I think I'm asking for bread, but I'm pointing to a stone? What if I think I'm asking for a fish, but I'm pointing at a snake?

Our Heavenly Father is a good Father: loving, discerning, and wise. He don't trick me by giving me something evil instead of something good. Neither will He go along with my foolishness by giving me something evil instead of something good.

So, the prayer, “Lord, make me righteous” might be a request for bread, if by righteous I mean “Let Christ’s righteousness dominate my life for His glory,” but it might be a request for a stone if by righteous I mean “Let everyone see how good I am.”

And the prayer “Lord, meet my needs” might be a request for a fish, if by “needs” I mean “the things I need to sustain life on earth and glorify God in my life and body,” but it might be a request for a serpent if by “needs” I mean “sinful desires.”

Listen once more to Jesus:

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“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

What is it that you need to follow Jesus well? What it is that you need to serve Him? What is it that you need to be righteous today? Ask. Seek. Knock. Entrust yourself to your Good Father in Heaven, and be at peace.