

Matthew 7:7-12 (NKJV)

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⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

⁹ Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?

¹¹ If you then, being 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!

¹² Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Doesn't this seem like an odd change of topic. What if I were to tell you it is **not** a change of topic. I believe this is still talking about the process of dealing with others. That is safe to believe because it starts with dealing with others and ends with dealing with others.

Matt 7:1 Don't judge

Matt 7:12 Do unto others.

Let's quickly remember how we got here.

Jesus has been telling us how the beatitudes people live. He has told us what scripture says **in contradiction to** how the pharisees taught it. He laid out what **they** taught and then what **scripture** and **Jesus** both said.

The whole process bumped the standard up higher than we can attain. We can see that, while the true Christian life is wonderful, it is always also not perfectly attainable.

Then Jesus talks about the inner world of **worry**. He calls us to trust Him and He tells us **how to think**. Does anyone here think that means that we will never **mistrust God** again? Does anyone think that means we will **never struggle** to not worry? Have any of us **mastered** this topic?

We all know better than that. We will continually have to reign in our thoughts. Then he tells us to **think** and **speak** correctly of others. He tells us how we should deal with others. He tells us how to see them **through the eyes of grace**, through the **eyes of the gospel**.

But those people hurt us, they are inconsiderate toward us, they don't do good things to us that they have in their power to do. They are unkind, thoughtless, harsh, uncaring, unsympathetic at times. How am I going to constantly maintain the right attitude toward them?

We know that we will spend a lifetime of reorienting to what Jesus said.

And then I look at me. I find it extremely difficult **not putting myself** in the center of the equation. I want to see through the eyes of **King Jon** instead of **King Jesus**. I want to see it through **my kingdom**, not **God's kingdom**.

As we go through the sermon on the mount I think we are supposed to get the idea that what is being laid down by Jesus just can't be done by us **perfectly**, especially when we rely on **our own** abilities. He keeps referring to issues of the heart that are so difficult to maintain mastery over. Lust and greed and worry and condescension. Those things are woven into my fleshly fabric. They are the **old me**, the me that is a **habit**.

Do you ever look at yourself on a bad day and think, I am not a Christian at all? I believe that if we take the sermon on the mount seriously, that will be a **common** experience. We are being called into a life that is contrary to our flesh's built in reactions and instincts. It is **beyond** us. It is **unattainable** by mere human effort. It is, well, **supernatural**. And it is supposed to be.

I used to idealistically expect that I could actually crest this mountain. I thought that if I could get some of the pesky sins behind me, I would reach the place where I would be cruising through life as a model Christian. Then I would be **really useful** to the Kingdom. I am old enough now to know better. I now believe that the messes we experience inside and outside of our skins is what we can expect. In fact, there is a sense that it is **supposed** to be our world. There is not supposed to be any **hope** that emanates from a **hopeless place**, a sin run place. This **current environment** cannot be hoped upon. There is no fixing our world. There is no fixing ourselves. **The whole thing is designed to cause unfixable people to hold onto the unbroken Christ**. He is the **only** hero, the **only** perfect one, the **only** model, the **only** one who has Arrived, and the **only** hope.

And we do not hold on to hope that we will attain perfection in this life. Our **hope** is like the people in wagon trains heading for California in the 1800's. **Arriving at our destination is our hope**. One day we will look in a mirror and see a person free from sin looking back at us. One day we will look at Jesus and we will be **free from tears of regret or anguish** in what we **wish we were** but we **are not**. On that day we will look at ourselves and praise Jesus. We are sojourners. We are travelers. We are not residents. Our final hope rests in **arriving** at our destination. We are not to get **addicted to this world**. And God has arranged it so life on this planet will **wean us** from the **love of it**. It is part of His plan.

So how do we live in this flux? How do we live **not worrying**? How do we live **not judging**? How do we live a supernatural existence in flesh that only wants to drag us back to our hog slop?

Now we have the context for our text. Now we are ready to hear what King Jesus has to say next. It is not a change of topic. It is what the topic of a **refusal to regard people wrongly** will drive us to. It is what all application of the sermon on the mount drives us to.

If we are going to live the proper Christian life, if we are going to successfully struggle to gain ground in our lives, we are going to experience an **epic awareness of our need**. We must know **what to do** with that need.

We cannot resort to how the world around us gets along with each other. The strategies of **avoiding dealing with the real issues with others**, of **taking our ball and going home** when suffering any kind of hurt, of **refusal to engage with the real issues** because it will be uncomfortable, of **living with resentments** from being harmed, of looking at others from a **position of superiority**, of refusing to invest in the lives of others because **it might hurt**, we could go on and on. These strategies do not take supernatural power to do. The world does them all day long. **Those strategies** will not drive us to Jesus. But if we try to do it **Jesus's way**, then we find we need a **miracle** because it simply is **not in us**.

Now we are ready to hear this.

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¹¹ If you then, being 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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This is written to people who are desperate to live like Jesus is prescribing. That is the context. And that is the **only context** it should be understood in.

The first thing we need to know so we get the **real point** is the **verb tense** of the Greek words.

This is probably better understood by us with this paraphrase.

Ask and keep asking and it will be given to you.

Seek and keep seeking and you will find.

Knock and keep knocking and it will be opened.

Do you see what it is saying in context.

Every day we wake up to new mercies (praise God) and new challenges. We wake up sinners in a sinful world. We wake up reborn people in a hostile environment to spirituality. So just like Jesus told us to **ask for food** because we **need food** every day, just like He told us to **rely upon Him for food clothing and shelter**, just like we were told to **regularly make confession of sin** because, well, we regularly sin, now He tells us to **keep relying upon God**, keep **depending** upon God, for the daily resources we need from Him to live the Christian life.

And look at the assumption. We **need this stuff**. We are **desperate for this stuff**. We **have to have it** and we **cannot do without it**.

So Jesus says **ask and keep asking**. Don't give up. Don't let what appears to be **delays** on God's part make you angry or bitter or hopeless. Keep doing it and God will provide that which you need to best serve Him.

You and I all have had "**Why God?**" times in our lives. We may be trying to do the right thing. We are as committed to His will as we know how to be. And we make decisions in an effort to be faithful. And then something happens completely unlooked for.

Maybe death, or sickness, or a broken relationship. And we want to say **Why God?** It seems like you are punishing me for good behavior. Why? Aren't we then tempted to **stop asking** and **seeking** and **knocking**? Aren't we tempted to think that these promises are patently **untrue**? I asked. I sought. I knocked. And look what I got. We might be tempted to think it is time to try something else. But look what it says. It does not say **ask for a while** and at the time of your choosing **evaluate**. Or **seek for a while** and then **draw conclusions** about how effective this process is. Or **knock once in a while** and see what happens. No, this is a continual process. And it is a process we will be tempted to get weary of.

I think of **2 Thessalonians 3:13 (NKJV)**

¹³ **But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.**

I built a little drainage area where I store my wood the other day. It was a simple task with a clear beginning and end and it all consisted of things I could easily do. I do not get weary of doing those things. But getting up every day to solve problem after problem at work, some which are beyond my control to accomplish, of that I get weary.

You mothers who are home with your kids, kids who continually need fed and diapers changed and disciplined. That is wearying work. We all have those things that weary us. Carla mentions washing dishes on that list. Usually the things that weary us are those things that never go away.

That is **what** this asking and seeking and knocking is **inspired by**. Our continual **need for spiritual help** to live the Christian life the way it is supposed to be lived. So when Jesus commands that we **keep doing these things**, it is obvious He says it because at some point, or many points, we will be **tempted to give up**. We will become convinced that **God is not listening**, or He **does not care**, or we will **never become** what we are trying to become. The **demand** upon us for resources that **God must provide** are **upon us every moment** of every day. It is no wonder that Christ commands us to keep at it and not give up.

And look at the result.

It will be given

You will find

It will be opened

This is a rock solid promise. But notice too. We are not told **when**. Does that look like faith to you. I think that is the idea. And we will look at the **why** in more detail later. But glance at what the **why** is based upon. The why we keep asking and seeking and knocking is based on the **goodness of God**. We don't do it primarily because it is **good for us** to carry on this **relentless exercise**. We do it because there is a **guaranteed in writing result** if we will do it. We will **get** what we need **to be holy**. We will **find** what we need to **minister to others**.

Opportunities to **minister** or **to be ministered to** will be opened. We keep asking and seeking and knocking because we know that a **good God** will give us **good gifts**.

This is the rock solid truth.

When we are driven by our love for Jesus, to do what Jesus says, and when that pursuit requires God's provision, that which we ask for we will always obtain.

That is what this is saying in context.

Listen to how wonderful this is.

When we are driven by our love for Jesus, to do what Jesus says, and when that pursuit requires God's provision, that which we ask for we will always obtain.

Mike used to say that prayer is asking and the answer is getting. That was based upon this kind of text. There is one sense that a prayer offered **according to the will of God** will always receive what it asks for. That is the kind of prayer Elijah had that we read about in the book of James.

James 5:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ **...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**

¹⁷ **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.**

¹⁸ **And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.**

Elijah **knew** the will of God, **prayed for** the will of God, and acted in complete **faith** that God would answer it. He **knew** He would receive it because **God said** He would receive that specific result, and **He did**.

There are prayers like that that we too can pray with complete confidence.

When we are driven by our love for Jesus to do what Jesus says and when that pursuit requires God's provision, that which we ask for we will always obtain.

This is **that** kind of prayer. Now granted we do not always ask **appropriately**. We might fill in the details of **what God must do** in a way that **God does not intend to do it**. Or we may give God a time table that He does not intend to meet.

But if you are trying to overcome a test or a temptation and need wisdom in doing so, if you ask you will get it.

There is a sample of this kind of praying in another place in James.

James 1:2-8 (NKJV)

² **My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**

³ **knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**

⁴ **But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

⁵ **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**

⁶ **But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.**

⁷ **For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;**

⁸ ***he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.***

God has **promised wisdom** for people trying to do His will in those situations, so if we pray for wisdom we must expect that somehow in some way at some time God will definitely **provide that wisdom** for dealing with that trial or temptation. Do you see how this works?

Now it is important for us to look at what our text in Matthew does not mean.

⁷ **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**

⁸ **For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.**

I was looking for some of the wrong interpretations I knew I would find online.

One so called preacher says this passage is talking about **hearing from God**. So pretty much, you can demand God to talk to you by quoting these verses.

This is also used for material things as well. It gets separated from its context and is taken to apply to anything we want.

Well this is not a promise that whatever hairbrained request we can **come up with**, God is now obligated **to do it**. Again, on the surface people might get this idea. But as we have so thoroughly seen, we cannot take the sermon on the mount **on the surface**. It is very dangerous to separate any of the **quotes** of the sermon on the mount **out of their context**.

Our charismatic brethren have done great harm to people's faiths by promising that now **our flesh** can **tell** King Jesus what **He must do**. By their logic, faith is something we must muster up in order to make God perform.

They reason-

God promised I will get whatever I ask for if I ask for it in faith.

God never lies.

So if I **do not get this thing**, the only possible reason could be that I did not have a good enough faith.

If the premise were true, it would be very good reasoning. But the premise is based on poor exegesis of the texts they quote.

By their reasoning, the weight falls **on us now** of coming up with some kind of **perfect faith**. This theology's appeal is no different than the false prophets in Elijah's day cutting themselves in an effort to get their gods to move in their

behalf. They had to display a better commitment, a more dramatic resolve. They had to produce **something more** to get God's attention.

What a horrible burden to put on people. And what a horrible representation of our Sovereign Lord. How many people have had their **confidence in God** damaged severely by **believing** these lies? They pray for healing for a loved one. They name it and claim it as if God promised it. Then they are devastated in several ways when the **healing does not happen**, and maybe even the person dies.

First, they experienced the **loss of a loved one**. That is hard enough.

But then they feel that they could have **saved** that person if they **only tried harder**. If only they had had a better faith. So they feel guilty.

Then they consider how **capricious** this God might be that has something good to give but because the person asking did not meet the perfect criteria it was withheld.

And then there is a realization that this person praying must simply not be good enough for God. Obviously since God did **not answer their prayer** of faith but He **does answer other people's** prayer of faith, they must be **inferior** if not completely rejected by God.

If I were the devil I would be very proud of this theology. It looks ultra spiritual, but it is as destructive as it could possibly be.

And then couple this with prosperity theology that uses our text to name it and claim it. They ask for a Lexus. They seek a Lexus. And they knock for a Lexus and they **better get a Lexus** if God is any good at all.

We know from the text that this is a **completely wrong application** of our text.

Isn't it so good to know that we are not under this kind of pressure. We will look at this more, but we can come to our Father as **just that, a Father**. A **wise** father who would never give us what we ask for knowing it would only **harm us**. All of us have stories of things we **asked God for** that He **never gave us**. And we look back and we say **Thank you Lord**. That thing would have harmed me. Or it certainly would not have helped me. It is so good that we do not have promises that tie God's hand into only **giving us what we ask for** and not **what we need**. Praise God He does not grant us that kind of power.

The problem is, to counter the false teaching that says we can make demands of God, it requires someone who really wants to see what this passage means in context. And that takes work. We live in a world addicted to soundbites. So we will have our work cut out for us.

OK, I want to focus on one more aspect of our text before we close today.

It is the **value of persistency**.

Perseverance

Jesus told several parables that explained the value of **importunity**. This is the word scholars often use to describe the trait Jesus talked about. **Importunity is an insistent or pressing demand.**

Basically it is the quality of **asking for something** and **not giving up**.

When our cat wants to come into the house it is **importune**.

When a baby wants fed it is **importune**.

When Jonathan wanted to go fishing as a kid he was **importune**.

We are asking for something and we will not stop asking until we get the thing.

This is always a good thing when that which we are asking for is ultimately for the glory of God.

When Jesus taught us how to pray in Luke Ch 11 he also provided the parable of the persistent friend

⁵ **And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? ⁸I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.**

⁹ **“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.**

We know we are applying the text properly because **both end up at the same conclusion** about asking, seeking and knocking.

We won't go into the text much but just to point out briefly what was happening. The friend needed bread. The other friend had the family asleep and it isn't like they had bedrooms. As soon as the friend got up to find bread, the kids would wake up and here they go again.

But the asking friend would not give up. And that is presented as the way that you and I are supposed to pray for those things that are clearly in God's interest. Luke 18 lays out a similar situation with a similar punch line.

Here Jesus says- **18 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,**

So we see that at least one thing that keeps us from asking, seeking and knocking is **losing heart**, just like we said earlier. In this passage a woman pesters a judge for justice and gets it because of her persistence.

Now we must remember that this is not talking so much about **why** we should persist as much as **how** we should persist. Our God is not **resistant** to our requests. We don't need to **stir him into action** by **irritating Him**. But we should pray in a way that shows a **commitment to getting a result**. We should pray in a way that demonstrates that we will not stop until we get what we ask for. But in

the case with God, we are persistent because **we KNOW that HE will give us** the good that we ask for.

In conclusion I hope that we are encouraged. It is assumed that it will be hard to live a spiritual life. That just backs what we **already** experience. We don't need to get the idea that it is any easier for anyone else. It isn't.

But our gracious God holds out to us this **promise of His provision**. It is not a maybe. It is a sure thing. And we are called to hold God to it with the understanding that **what we ask for** must fall under the **criteria He describes**. We can run to God today and this week for the things **we** and **others** need in order to follow Christ. It is there for us. This is one of those great and precious promises that sustain us through hard times.

But our good God is willing and able to give us good gifts.

When we are driven by our love for Jesus, to do what Jesus says, and when that pursuit requires God's provision, that which we ask for we will always obtain.