

The Good Gift of Prayer
Matthew 7:7-11

Please turn in your Bible's to Matthew 7. Over the next several weeks we'll conclude our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:7, where we will begin today, through to the end, can be seen as Jesus' concluding remarks, His application section for all he's taught in this sermon. There's an overarching theme in the Sermon on the Mount that I trust you are seeing as we have been studying through it. And the theme is this, without God's work in your life, without God transforming your heart, taking out the heart of stone and putting in a heart of flesh, without God intervening and providing a righteousness that goes far beyond the superficial surface self-righteousness we are all too familiar with, we are totally lost. If we think we are good enough, can handle God's demands on our own, work hard enough, or just do better, we're deceived.

That's because **the Sermon on the Mount strips away our self-righteousness and humbles us by exposing our human impossibility**. It is humanly impossible for anyone to live on his own power the kind of life Jesus describes throughout this sermon. It is impossible to have the characteristics of the beatitudes, to live according to the teachings of Jesus in chapter 5, to follow the practices Jesus describes in chapter 6, and to comply with the commands He has given in these last several sections of the sermon on a human level alone. We do not have within ourselves enough wisdom, strength or will power to live perfectly righteously. We must live it according to God's wisdom, in His strength in simple obedience to Him, or we will only live in what Paul described as, "... *having the appearance of godliness*" but denying God's power (2 Tim. 3:5).

What's more, **the Sermon on the Mount makes confirms if you want to live like a child of God you have to be a child of God**. Jesus is speaking to disciples, to those who have already made a commitment in to follow Jesus, to being what we would call after Jesus' death and resurrection, a Christian. The Sermon on the Mount is not rules and regulations for anyone to follow or partake in and therefore gain God's favor. The Sermon on the Mount is for those who have already been made God's child through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Sermon on the Mount is teaching us how God's child is to live as God's child.

The Sermon on the Mount also makes plain that we need grace, humility, and insight that is unnatural to man as we live in God's kingdom. This is what we studied and saw last week as we looked at how we normally judge other inappropriately with a self-righteous, graceless, superficial attitude, and how Jesus says we are to judge appropriately; by acknowledging our hypocrisy and removing the log in our own eye so we can see clearly to help others remove the insignificant speck in their eye. Left to ourselves, we quickly set up our own standards for right and wrong and then judge others against that standard. If someone does not do as well as we do, we look down on them. We see them as less righteous than ourselves. And if left to ourselves, our pride will lead us into giving what is precious and holy to dogs and hogs. The truth is that we must judge ourselves and others only according to what the Word of God says, according to its standards of righteousness which we cannot possibly meet on our own. And we must remember that people come to God through the Holy Spirit's work, not through our ability to persuade or cajole.

And so Jesus gives us a tremendous resource in our arsenal for living as citizens of the Kingdom of God, a resource of unimaginable power, of inconceivable worth, and indescribable access – the resource, the gift, the good gift of prayer. As Jesus wraps up the Sermon on the Mount He gives His first point of application; how do we as followers of Christ, as disciples, as Christians live as Kingdom people in our world – and part of the answer is, we pray. And so Jesus gives us 8 encouragements, 8 motivations to be people of prayer in seeking to accomplish, apply, and live out the demands of the kingdom of God in our world. Look with me at Matthew 7:7-11. Jesus says, "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door 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 ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to you children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to*

those who ask him!” Eight encouragements, eight motivations to pray as we seek to live as faithful disciples and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Encouragement #1: God invites us to pray. Three times we are invited to pray: ask, seek knock. These three invitations are repeated in verse 8, everyone one who asks, the one who seeks, the one who knocks. The repetition is meant to get out attention and meant to say to us, this is important, I mean this, come and pray. James reminds us in James 4:2 that we “... *do not have because we do not ask.*” Often we may find we are struggling to live as Jesus commands in the Sermon on the Mount, for example of loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us, or as we looked at last Sunday, admitting our own hypocrisy and in grace filled humility dealing with our own stuff first, before we attempt to assist another. And Jesus is saying, listen ask your Father for what you need. Seek your Father for the help you need. Knock on the door of your Heavenly Father’s house, He will answer and let you in. As disciples and followers of Jesus we are encouraged to pray, invited to pray repeatedly; ask, seek, knock, to pray.

Encouragement #2: God makes promises if we pray. Jesus invites us three times to pray, but gives us seven promises that come if we pray. If you ask, verse 7, it will be given. If you seek, you will find, if you knock, it will be opened to you. Askers receive, seekers find, and those who knock have the door opened. Verse 11, when we pray, our Heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask. I think the point of these indescribable promises is simply to encourage God’s people to come talk with God, seek His presence, seek his counsel and pray. We do not pray in vain. God hears, God responds, God answers, He promises to give His children good things when we pray. So pray often, pray regularly, pray confidently knowing your asking, seeking, and knocking will be answered.

Encouragement #3: God makes himself available at multiple levels. We are encouraged to pray not merely because of the number of invitations or the enumeration of promises made, but also to come and pray because God meets us in multiple ways. Ask, seek, knock. If I’m present in a room, my kids can simply turn and ask and I can respond. If I’m in a different room in our home, but not seen at the moment, my kids might seek me out for what they need. If I’m in the bathroom ... they knock over and over and over. The point is it doesn’t matter if you find God immediately close, almost touchable with nearness, or hard to see or even with barriers between, God will hear, and will give good things because you have sought Him in prayer.

Encouragement #4: Everyone who asks receives. It’s subtle but important to see, verse 8, EVERYONE who asks receives, EVERYONE who seeks finds, EVERYONE who knocks the door will be opened. Now, the “everyone” Jesus is referring to is not every human being on the planet. God hears only the prayers of His people, as Proverbs 15:29 says, “*The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayers of the righteous.*” So the everyone Jesus is talking about is every follower of Jesus, every Christian. This is a promise that only applies to the children of God. If we will not have Jesus as our savior and God as our Father, then this promise does not apply. But if we are God’s child by grace along through faith alone in Christ alone, what a great motivation to pray, to know that because we know Jesus we are known by God the Father as well. “Everyone” encourages us to overcome our timidity and hesitancy in coming to God. None of God’s children are excluded

Encouragement and Motivation #5: We are coming to our good, Heavenly Father. Verse 11, “*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!*” I love that there is an exclamation point at the end of verse 11. This is a big deal. Father was not a throw away label for Jesus. It is one of the greatest of all truths. God is our Father, we are taught to come in prayer to God saying, *Our Father*. The implication in coming to our good Heavenly Father is that He will never give us what is bad. He will never give us what is harmful – even if that is what we want. He will only ever give us good things, and why? Because He is our good Father.

Motivation #6: Our Heavenly Father is better than our earthly father. It’s unflattering, perhaps even difficult to hear, but Jesus pulls no punches. Again verse 11, “*If you then*”, speaking to those present and the original language pointing to those who have made a commitment to follow Jesus, “*If you then, who are evil*”. Lest we forget, Jesus

reminds us that compared to God, all our righteousness is as filthy rags, that there is no one righteous no even one, that even the best of us compared to others of us are evil – meaning we are all tainted and marred by the stain of sin. But not our heavenly Father, in Him there is not darkness at all (1 John 1:5). I am aware and Jesus was even more aware, that our earthly fathers are sinful. So Jesus goes beyond the encouragement of saying that God is your Father, and says that God is always better than your earthly father, because all earthly fathers are sinful and God is not. This is a clear instance of Jesus' belief and the Bible's teaching of the universal sinfulness of human beings. And the point Jesus makes is: even fallen, sinful fathers usually have enough common grace to give good things to their children. There are sadly, terribly abusive fathers. But in most places in the world, fathers are jealous for the good of their children. But God is always better. And this is what gives force to Jesus' argument, if earthly fathers who are evil can give good gifts and want to give good gifts to their children, how much more the perfectly holy, perfectly righteous, perfectly good Heavenly Father will give only good things to His children – so come ask of Him, seek Him, knock on His door, He will answer.

Encouragement #7: **We can trust God's goodness because He has made us his in Christ.** This encouragement isn't in the text as we read it, but it's implied – God will give us good things AS his children because He has already given us the gift to BECOME His children. Friends, we tend to think that it is the things we need now, the things we need to make our lives more pleasant or bearable that are the most important things in our lives. But that is not true, the most important thing we need in our lives is to have our sin atoned for and cleansed, to be forgiven and brought into a right relationship with God, to be adopted as sons and daughters into God's household. John 1:12 says, *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”* Friends, the primary reason we can come boldly before the throne of grace, that we can make our requests known to God, is because God in Jesus Christ has Himself made the way clear. If, while we were still sinners Christ died for the ungodly, and He did, how much more will our Heavenly Father, the one who has freely given us the right to become sons and daughters by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, how much more can he be trusted to give us good things when we ask.

Encouragement #8: **The cross is the foundation of prayer.** Underlying everything Jesus is saying about prayer is the cross of Christ. The only reason evil people can be called children of God, can come asking, seeking, and knocking and have confidence that God hears and answers with good things is because we are washed in the blood of Christ and clothed in His righteousness. The death of Jesus is the foundation for all the promises of God and all the answers to prayer that we ever get. This is why we say “in Jesus's name” at the end of our prayers. Everything depends on him.

Our heavenly Father gives good things, only good things. He does not give serpents for fish, or rocks for bread. Therefore, the text itself points away from the conclusion that Ask and you will receive means Ask and you will receive the very thing you ask for when you ask for it in the way you ask for it. It doesn't say that. And it doesn't mean that.

If we take the passage as a whole, it says that when we ask and seek and knock — when we pray as needy children looking away from our own resources to our trustworthy Heavenly Father — he will hear and he will give us good things. Sometimes just *what* we asked. Sometimes just *when* we ask it. Sometimes just *the way* we desire. And other times he gives us something better, or at a time he knows is better, or in a way he knows is better.

And of course, this tests our faith. Because if we thought that something different were better, we would have asked for it in the first place. But we are not God. We are not infinitely strong, or infinitely righteous, or infinitely good, or infinitely wise, or infinitely loving. And therefore, it is a great mercy to us and to the world that we do not get all we ask.

But if we take Jesus at his word, How much blessing we forfeit because we do not ask and seek and knock — blessings for ourselves, our families, our church, our nation, our world. May we be disciples who pray, pray boldly, pray confidently, and pay continually to our good Heavenly Father who promises to give us good things.