

## Get Real!

Expect Good Things From God

Matthew 7:7-11

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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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 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!" (Matt 7:7-11).

Chapter seven is the final lap in our journey through this great sermon where Jesus attacks veneer religion. Last week we looked at the subject of judging, and Jesus' call to balance sinful judgment with wise discernment. Three weeks from now (October 4), we will launch into a new section of Matthew as we look at chapters 8-10 which will carry us through Missions Conference and up to the Christmas holidays.

Next week we will conclude this section, called "Get Real", with a message entitled "Only a Few are Truly Saved", and then we are going to take a Sunday to talk about the subject of believer's baptism. Over the last nine months our elders have worked on our understanding of the importance of baptism. This is especially important since we have added so many new people to our congregation over the last year. The title of my message on September 27 will be "Everyone Should Be Baptized and Some Again."

### **An Encouraging Tone**

Well, that is where we've been and where we are going. What about today? It is very interesting to me that Matthew puts this section of scripture here. The tone of verses 7-11 is very different than what is coming and what we've just heard. It really shows the balance of the Bible. Matthew 7:7-11 is an extremely encouraging passage which is meant to fill us with hope, faith, and love for God. Its message is not as direct or convicting. Sometimes the Bible aims to move us along spiritually by hard-hitting truth; at other times the Bible helps us along through lavish encouragement. Such is the case with our passage today. The encouragement is, frankly, breath-taking.

You could boil this passage down with this statement: **bank your prayer life on God's love for you.** It seems that Jesus wants to encourage his disciples to keep praying, but he is not just calling them to be persistent; the call is different. Perseverance in prayer is certainly a part

of the equation but it is not the end-game here. Jesus' goal is to call his disciples to pray from a robust understanding of God's love for them. The critical phrase for this passage is found in verse 11: "how much more." Jesus wants for his followers to pray with the "how-much-moreness" of God in mind. He aims to motivate pray by God-centered encouragement.

To do that, Jesus gives three reasons to pray:

1. Pray because it works
2. Pray because it makes sense
3. Pray because your Father's love is so great

Let's look at each of these.

### **Pray Because It Works (vv 7-8)**

Before we get into the meaning of these verses, I first have to show you the beauty of how they are arranged. There is a wonderful parallelism here designed to make Jesus' point very clear. Here is how the passage could be outlined:

*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.*

Notice how the passage is organized in a pair of threes. Asking, seeking, and knocking and the results are mentioned twice. The organization of the passage is designed to make one point very clear: **prayer is answered**. Notice that there are no conditions, no qualifications, no exceptions, and no fine print.

"The promises are astonishingly open-ended. Whenever this passage is read with simple faith, it will take one's breath away. Six different times in six different ways Jesus almost begs us to pray, and promises solemnly that simple asking *receives*, simple seeking *finds*, and simple knocking *opens*."<sup>1</sup>

Ask, seek, and knock all refer to prayer. Some commentators make a distinction between them<sup>2</sup>, but it seems to me that Jesus is simply referring to an increasingly level of intensity of action. The words are all present imperatives which means that this is a command which

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<sup>1</sup> Fredrick Bruner, *The Christbook – Matthew 1-12*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), 342.

<sup>2</sup> Some suggest that asking = prayer, seeking = action, and knocking = meditation

should be continuous – keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. So our part is maintaining the habitual communication with God.

God's part is expressed with six promises that are in the future passive tense (e.g., "it will be given", "you will find", "it will be opened", "everyone who asks receives", "the one who seeks finds", "to one who knocks it will be opened"). In other words, the promises are future oriented, and God must perform them. Disciples are responsible to ask; God will answer.

What is striking here is the fact that Jesus seems unconcerned about any level of misunderstanding. You could take this passage to mean that we have a blank check from God for whatever we want. Certainly the passage doesn't mean that, but Jesus gives no qualification. Why does he do that?

The reason is that Jesus seems to be more concerned with another problem: **a lack of practical faith**. We are too often guilty of prayerlessness because we lose hope, we get discouraged, we think that it is pointless, or we just simply fail to talk to God about it. In other words, life goes on, burdens come, challenges approach and our tendency is to talk to everyone **but God** about the issue. We talk to a friend, buy a book, listen to a message, seek counseling, or talk to ourselves while being tragically silent with God. "Jesus opens the door of faith widely as they will ever be opened again and promises a fruitful audience with the Father – for simple asking."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus calls us to pray. He motivates us to pray. If you ask, you'll receive. If you seek you will find. If you knock, it will be opened. Jesus calls us to have faith, to believe again.

Two thoughts come to my mind. First, I can only imagine that there are many people who live practically like God doesn't even exist. Your communication to him is so sporadic. You view God like an emergency brake – something you only pull when it is really bad. Or you view God like an air-bag. You know it's there and you are grateful that it deploys in a wreck, but you don't really use it unless an accident happens. I don't want to press the analogy too far, but Jesus wants us to see the prayer is not a safety feature of your life. Prayer is the fuel that drives your life. He wants us to constantly use our God-given resource of prayer. Prayer is the gas-pedal of forward movement. Prayer works.

Secondly, I can imagine that there are other people who have stopped praying about something, and you need faith to keep praying. A wayward son, a hard-hearted teenager, a drug-addicted friend, a wandering spouse or a body-consumed daughter require faith in prayer. An uncertain future, financial needs, unemployment benefits that are running out, an account that you just lost, a home that won't sell – these should become platforms for prayer.

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<sup>3</sup> Bruner, 343

And Jesus bid us to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Prayer works.

### **Pray Because It Makes Sense (v 9)**

Jesus makes his next point with a comparison from lesser to greater. Verse 9 is the beginning of the comparison, and it comes into full picture in verses 10-11.

The point here is very simple and just reading the passage makes it almost self-explanatory. Jesus says that parents instinctively want to give their children what is good. This is normal. For a child to ask his or her parents for a piece of bread only to discover it is stone or to ask for a fish only to be given a snake or serpent would be cruel and unkind.

Implicit in this analogy is deception. A stone looks like a piece of bread but it is useless for food. A serpent might briefly appear like a serpent, but it is harmful. It is one level of cruelty to neglect a child, but it is another level to respond to his or her need with a useless or harmful gift. It is unthinkable and not normal for a parent to be like that. It doesn't make any sense. It is unnatural.

Jesus' point will come into full picture in verses 10-11, but for right now it is important for you to see what he is saying here. We ought to pray because it makes sense that God, as our Father, would not respond with answers that are useless or harmful. Jesus tells us to keep asking the Father because it is natural for a Father to want to be good to his children.

Now that is where some of you honestly have a problem. Your childhood was marked by cruelty, deception, uncertainty, and fear when it came to your parents. You could not trust that your parents and maybe your Dad specifically had your best interest in mind. To hear that God is called Father creates a problem for you. And the only thing I can tell you is: 1) It isn't normal for a parent to be like that, 2) God is not like your earthy parents.

Loving relationships are supposed to produce good gifts. That's how it is supposed to be on earth. And it your Heavenly Father operates the same way but so much more. Good parents do good to their children. An infinitely good God is going to do good too. It just makes sense.

### **Pray Because Your Father Loves You (vv 10-11)**

Do you remember the three words that I told you at the beginning of the message are key to understanding the meaning of this passage? **"How much more."** It is in verse 11 that Jesus' case reaches its climax. After calling us to pray because it works and because it makes sense, he shows us that we are not fools to keep asking, seeking, and knocking. Why? Because the Father loves us. We are to bank our praying on the "much-moreness" of God.

In verse 10 Jesus makes the comparison with earthly parents very clear. "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..." Earthly fathers give their children what is good, and they are evil or bad in comparison to God. God is infinitely better than earthly parents. So if it makes sense that sinful, depraved, and selfish parents are inclined to give good things to their children, what do you think it is like with a wholly righteous, majestically kind, and all-powerful God? "...how much more will your Father in heaven give to those who ask Him!" The much-moreness of God should motivate us to more asking, more seeking, and more knocking.

This is the second breath-taking statements about prayer. The first one we saw in verses 7-8 as God promise to answer our prayers. The second one is here and it serves as a primary motivation to keep praying: the depth of the Father's love. This divine love is so infinite, so vast, so beautiful, and so profound that it boggles the mind while at the same time creating faith. It is the kind of love that makes you say, "unbelievable!" and instantly motivates you to pray with God-centered faith and trust.

Now there is no better example of God's love than the sacrifice of the Son on the cross. The loving gift of Christ becomes the ground of love, faith, and prayer.

16 "For God so **loved** the world, that he **gave** his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:23).

20 But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; **pray** in the Holy Spirit; 21 keep yourselves in the **love of God**, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life (Jude 20-22)

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him **graciously give us all things**? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the **love of Christ**? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor

height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the **love of God** in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:31-39).

Do you see the implication? God's profoundly, amazing love – evidenced mostly clearly in the gift of his Son – calls us to the assurance that He will give us everything we need. The cross shows us the "how-much-moreness" of God's love. It is breath-taking, and it is meant to motivate us to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking.

Expect good things from God! Not because you are selfish (which you are) or because you are demanding. No, the Father will not give you something that is bad for you or if it is just to fulfill your sinful desires (see James 4:1-3). Expect good things from God because that is what he is like. Expect good things from God because that is what he has shown, most gloriously, in the gift of his own son. Expect good things from God tells us to. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking – he will answer.

Prayer works, it makes sense, and it is rooted in God's love.

To those of you who are weary, discouraged, burdened, or have faith that is starting to waver – let me take you back to the cross and remind you that this is what God is like. There can be no greater example. He is infinitely full of love for you. So pray! Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking!

Joseph Scriven was a Christian man who knew pain. The day before his wedding, his fiancé died. A few years later, after relocating in Canada, he fell in love again but this fiancé died as well from pneumonia. His mother lived across the ocean in his homeland of Ireland, and she was terribly sick. Joseph didn't have enough money to travel to see her. So he wrote her poem called "Pray without Ceasing." In 1868 a musician, Charles Converse, set Scriven's poem to music.<sup>4</sup>

*What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.*

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<sup>4</sup> Lindsay Terry, "What a Friend we have in Jesus – how an eccentric but compassionate Irishman wrote one of our great hymns," Christianity Today/Today's Christian, July/August 2004 - <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/2004/julaug/11.16.html>

*Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.*

*Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised Thou wilt all our burdens bear  
May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to Thee in earnest prayer.  
Soon in glory bright unclouded there will be no need for prayer  
Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion there.*

Bank your praying on the love God!

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