

Ask... Seek... Knock...

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[0:00] Turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 7. We've been working our way through Matthew, we've been working our way through the Sermon on the Mount, and here we are in Matthew chapter 7, verses 7 through 11, and our Lord King tells us about prayer.

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?

Well, in this section on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compels us to pray, to ask, and to seek, and to knock. He's been calling us, his disciples, to a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees.

[1:16] You can look at that on chapter 5, verse 20. That is a high call. But if you look over at chapter 5, verse 48, you see this call.

You, therefore, my disciples, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. And so, before we talk about this call to prayer Jesus is making on us, you've got to be reminded of what he's been calling us to in this sermon all along.

It's a call to holiness. Let me highlight some things. We know we're not supposed to murder people, but we're not supposed to hate them either.

We're not supposed to commit adultery with people, but we're not to lust in our hearts for others either. We know we're not supposed to hate our enemies, but Jesus calls us to the high call.

We're to love our enemies. We know we're not to live for the dot and store up treasures on earth, but we're to live for the line and store up treasures in heaven. We know we're not to be anxious about our lives, but seek first the kingdom and his righteousness.

[2:28] We know we're not to be sinfully critical, ungraciously judgmental of our brothers and sisters. Rather, we're to take the log out of our own eyes so that we can take the speck out of our brother and sisters.

This is high call stuff. This is calling to holiness, a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees, the very professional religious folk of the day. This is a call to holiness, to perfection.

It's beyond us. Jesus is calling us to the impossible. Now maybe you got one of these down. Maybe you're like, yeah, you know, I'm never anxious.

Never anxious. Well, how about the rest of the Sermon on the Mount? If you read through it like most of us read through it, you're like, no, I cannot do that.

That's beyond me. That's exactly the point. The Sermon brings us to an end to ourselves. It exposes in us our constant need for our God.

[3:36] Our constant need to depend on our Father for only what He can give, the good gift of holiness. And that's the point of why Jesus is brought us to this part of the Sermon.

He's bringing it to application. He's turning us to response. And the first response He calls us to here is to pray, to ask, seek, and knock.

You can't do it, brother and sister in Christ. You can't do it. You can't live out the Sermon on the Mount in your own power. You can't. But God can give you the grace you need.

And we must humble Himself, ourselves, and seek Him. So this morning, brother and sister in Christ, you need to hear this. Your Father in Heaven wants you to come to Him.

He wants you to ask Him for the good, holy things. To give you what only He can to live a life that only He can enable.

[4:43] And so this morning, in this passage, I want you to see three things. We are to pray persistently. We are to pray with promise.

And we are to pray paternally with an eye to our Father. We are to be persistent in our prayerful pursuit of perfection, of holiness.

That's the call. So let's look at this first point. Pray persistently. If you look at chapter 7, verse 7, 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. There are three words of persistence that you need to understand.

You already see them. Ask, seek, knock. And so again, remember, at this point in the sermon, this was a sermon Jesus preached. He's walked us through the call to holiness and now He's calling us to respond.

[5:54] And He's saying, pray. Pray, ask, seek, and knock for the very things I've just called you to. Call upon your Father.

Here's what I love about Jesus. He says, okay, if you've got kind of a lust issue in your heart, just don't go work it out. Call upon your Holy Father.

Ask Him for purity. Seek Him for a godly life. Knock on His door to open ways unto holiness that only He can.

To be persistent in our prayerful pursuit of perfection. We're never going to be perfect on this side of glory. But that doesn't mean we strive.

We don't strive. We strive. He's called us to this. And He is able to give us what we need. These three verbs, ask, seek, and knock, are commands.

[6:58] Scholars call them imperatives. Have you ever seen a war movie and there's a commander and He has His groups around Him and there's explosions and rumbling and He says to His team, team, it's imperative that we get hill number 473.

It's imperative. It's vital. It's essential. It's necessary. That's what an imperative is. There's urgency. And so Jesus is saying, in light of this call to holiness, holiness, it is imperative that you call upon your Father in Heaven to give you what you need.

It's imperative that you ask. It's imperative that you seek. It's imperative that you knock. In the original language, these imperatives are in the present tense, which means it has an ongoing force. And so you could say it like this. Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Do you know why? Because the Sermon on the Mount is a call on us all the way through until we see Jesus face to face.

We're to keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. It's persistent. Persistent asking, seeking, and knocking.

[8:20] And not only do these three imperatives have this ongoing force, they have increasing urgency. Did you notice that? We move from asking to clicking up a notch to seeking to clicking up a notch to knocking.

My youngest daughter, Mary, embodies this. Let me show you how. This is how it works out. Mary has a particularly strong bond with my wife, Jenny.

And so Mary's at the dining room table and it begins with an ask. Mom, where are my stretchy pants? Mom! Mom!

Mom! Mom! The ask. And it's persistent. But then when Jenny doesn't respond, the asking continues, but it moves into seeking.

Mom! Where are you? Mom! Mom! Where are you? I'm up in my room. Walk, walk, walk.

[9:35] Step, step, step. And if the door is closed, Mom! Where are my stretchy pants? Will you let me in, please?

You know what my little daughter illustrates? She's pursuing her parent for what she needs. She will not be denied. We, as children of our father, we ask and then we seek him and then we knock on his door to open up so that he can provide what we need.

This pursuit, this persistence, it's a pursuit of our heavenly father who has what we need for holiness. He is the object of our pursuit.

He is the one that gives us what we need for holiness. That's not in the bottom of a crackerjack box. Our father gives that. So if you're anxious about something or you're tempted to be critically judgmental of someone else, ask your father.

[10:57] Go to him. Ask him for a peace that transcends all understanding. Ask him for a humility that sees your own sin for what it is and you can help others.

Ask him. Seek him. Knock on his door for that. Let me ask this question. What is the need for the persistence?

Why the ongoing asking, ongoing seeking, ongoing knocking? What's up with that? Well, I've already alluded to it. We are to pray persistently because we are in persistent need.

Jesus knows us really well. And the kind of persistent need we have is the need for God's grace to make us holy, holy, holy.

To grow us in holiness. The fancy word is sanctification. The process of being made more and more like Jesus in our everyday lives. We need persistent for that.

[12:05] It's a persistent, prayerful pursuit of paternal perfection. Holiness. Holiness. We are asking him for the grace that he alone provides to make us like him.

That's why this is a persistent need. You need it everyday. God says, I am holy. You be holy for I am holy.

We need his help. Now, if you fail to make the connection between what Jesus is calling us to here and what has proceeded in the Sermon on the Mount, you know what you are going to ask your father for?

You are going to be content to ask him for Green Bay Packer tickets. You are going to be asking him for things that are good things, but not the greatest things.

Your father wants you asking him for good things unto holiness. Throwing Packer tickets, great. So, what we see here with this persistent praying is Jesus commanding us to depend persistently on our father.

[13:31] It's essentially an act of ongoing dependence is what we're being called to. It's a call to ongoing humility. It's a call to abiding in our God.

We need him in order to live the life he's called us to. Are you seeing this? Are you seeing the need?

How do you respond to what Jesus is calling you to? How do you respond to this? How do you respond to this call to persistent praying? I can imagine two kinds of responses.

The first kind is the way that I typically respond to something like this and that is to go into pragmatic list mode. So, it goes something like this. All right, Jesus is calling me to pray persistently.

Okay, I got it. Check. Now, the reason why I don't pray persistently is, well, it's a lack of discipline. Check. And so, what I need now, more than anything else, is a list of things to be praying for so that I can be praying more persistently.

[14:40] Or better yet, I need to wake up earlier in order to pray more. Or maybe even better yet, what are the books on prayer that I can be praying so that I can be more persistent in my praying?

What do I need? Do I need to get more accountability in my life? Do I need to listen to more sermons? What do I need in order to be more persistent in my praying? A few Sundays ago, I preached a sermon and I made an illustration.

It's the difference between the Christian life as a rowboat and the Christian life as a sailboat. And when we respond to a call like this by saying, what do I need to do more?

It's like grabbing a rowboat. Okay, I just need to pray more. That's not what Jesus is getting at here. The problem Jesus is putting his finger on is not a lack of discipline. The problem that Jesus is putting his finger on is a lack of understanding our desperate need for him.

[15:45] that's where it starts. And that leads me to the second kind of response. The Sermon on the Mount, it exposes our constant need for God's grace as his disciples.

It exposes, it shows us, we can't live this without him. And so if we don't need more discipline, what we need more of is God himself and the grace he provides.

That's what we need. That's what we're going to. That's where Jesus is bringing us to here. You can't live this on your own. So ask, seek, knock, depend on your heavenly father for this.

Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep seeking your father. And then when you've got that sense of desperation in place, that's when you start looking for books.

That's when you start looking for accountability. That's when you start looking for help. But you need first to attend to your heart. Are you desperate? Do you want holiness?

[16:55] Are you motivated to pursue your father for the only thing he can give you for it? Do you want it? Do you want holiness?

Do you want the sermon on the mount? Do you want that for your life? We're to pray persistently because we are in persistent need of God's grace.

We're to pray persistently. And the second point I want you to see here is we're to pray with promise. promise. If you look at verses 7 and 8 you see the imperatives right?

Ask, seek, and knock. But what you also need to see is that every imperative is met with a promise. Ask and it will be given to you. Promise.

Seek imperative and you will find promise. Knock imperative and the door will be opened unto you. Promise. promise. promise. Every imperative is met with a promise.

[18:07] Jesus in verse 8 is emphasizing the certainty of knowing that your heavenly father when sought for holiness will say yes.

promise. It's his joy to give it. Your heavenly father hears your persistent prayers and persistently answers them.

He wants good for you. He wants you to share in his holiness more than you want to. Jesus in this with these promises he wants us to be certain that if we are persistent praying God will persistently answer.

Did you hear the word if? Is Jesus saying here that we can ask the father for anything we want and we can be certain that we will receive it for anything?

Is he saying that? He's not saying that. He's not saying that. We all know that's the case. And we could probably make an argument just from our own experience.

[19:20] I'm guessing you have prayed for things that you have not received. The issue here is the kind of promise that Jesus is making.

There are classically two kinds of promises. There are unconditional promises and there are conditional promises. The unconditional promise is when party A commits to doing something for party B and it has no bearing on what party B does.

Party A is going to follow through. The classic example is for us Christians. God says, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Period.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Period. Unconditional promises. But a conditional promise is a promise that goes something like this.

Let's say one of my children wants to use the car. And I, as his father, knowing that there's other areas of his life to attend to, says, son, I would be glad for you to use the vehicle.

[20:43] I promise that you can use the vehicle if you clean your room. That's a conditional promise. And what we see going on here in Matthew chapter 7, 7 through 8, are conditional promises.

Ask. And it will be given to you. There are three conditional promises going on. Three conditions. You may not see them, so I want to draw them out for you.

You ready? Condition one is this. You've got to be a Christian. Condition two is this. You've got to be a Christian who's actually asking. And condition three is this.

You've got to be a Christian who's asking according to God's will. Those are the conditions. And God says, you meet those and I will give you what you're asking for.

You're going to find what you're looking for. I'm going to open the way for you to walk in. Now, I want to help you see that more clearly. So, condition one, you've got to be a Christian.

[21:57] If you look at verse seven, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you.

So, the really important question we need to answer is this. Who's the you? And that's where you flip back to chapter five, verse one. We have the answer to that question.

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, his disciples.

Who's the you? His disciples, followers of Jesus. That's who the promise is to. You've got to be a follower of Jesus to be certain that God the Father is going to answer your prayers.

you've got to be a child of the Father. That's the first condition. The second condition is this. You need to be asking. Did you notice?

[23:10] Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened unto you. James says it this way, James 4, 2.

you have not because you ask not. Does God know our needs before we ask?

Absolutely. Does, is he able to meet your needs? Oh yeah, he's all powerful. He owns a cattle on a thousand hills. Does he even want to meet your needs?

Oh yes, he does. But if you don't ask, he won't give it. So why? What's up with that? Our God, our Father, wants us depending on him.

He wants us coming to him. We are dependent upon our Father. This past week, I have been asking myself the question, what is it that I want that I don't have?

[24:16] Because I'm not asking for it. And I started thinking about our church, and I started thinking, what is it that I want to see happen that I haven't been asking for? And you know what it is?

That God would add to our numbers by conversions, by people coming to faith in Jesus through our corporate witness of the gospel, and they being added to our numbers.

We're so grateful for the people God is bringing here. But we want God to bring people who have yet to hear about Jesus, they hear about Jesus through our witness, and they come to Christ.

Oh man, I started praying that. What is it that you want from your Father unto holiness that you don't have because you haven't been asking?

Maybe it's something with your marriage, maybe it's something with your parenting. We have not because we ask not. That's condition two. You've got to be a Christian who's asking.

[25:16] Condition three. You've got to be a Christian who's asking according to God's will. Do you remember the immediate context of what precedes this?

Jesus is calling us unto holiness. He's calling us to perfection. perfection. And so when he says, ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened. What's the it? A life pleasing to God. A life lived unto his name.

Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. There are some other passages to look at that make a case for God hearing the prayers of obedient sons and daughters.

I'm just going to turn you to one. If you would turn to 1 John chapter 3 verse 22. 1 John 3 22 says this.

[26:31] And whatever we ask we receive from him. Well that sounds great. Whatever we ask we receive from him.

And then look at the rest of the verse. Because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. Do you know how you can be assured that God is not only hearing your prayers but is poised to answer them?

He's intending to. He will. He will. You walk in his ways. You walk in obedience to him. We see the very similar thing in John 15 7.

1 Peter 3 7 talks to husbands. Husbands live with your wives in an understanding way. And he closes it by saying if you don't your prayers are going to be hindered. So this third condition is a condition in which if we want to be certain that God is going to answer our prayers, one of the steps that we take is to make sure we're walking in obedience to him.

So three conditions. You've got to be a Christian, you've got to be a Christian who's asking, and you've got to be a Christian who's asking according to God's will. When these are met, you can be fully confident that God is going to give you what you're asking for, above and beyond what you ask or imagine.

[27:58] So what I've been trying to say is these promises are conditional promises. Another way to talk about it is this.

When we want what God wants, God's delighted to give it. we pray with promise. It's a conditional promise, but it's a promise.

The last point is this. We pray paternally. Have you heard the word of your maternal grandmother? You're talking about your grandmother on your mother's side.

Your paternal grandmother is your grandmother on your father's side. paternal means father. It comes from a Greek word, pater, which means father.

And it's the word that's being used in this text in verse 11. How much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask?

[29:11] In verses 9 through 11, Jesus shows us why we can be certain that God will follow through on his promise. If we are going to him and asking for things that are right along his will, we can be absolutely confident that he's going to respond.

Why? Because of who he is. His character. You see, the case that Jesus is making here is ultimately prayer is theological.

theological. It matters what you think about God. He's, Jesus is grounding our confidence in prayer in God's character.

The very fatherhood of God. Let me just read verses 9 through 11 for you. 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? That's really kind of interesting questions, don't you think? 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 gifts to those who ask him?

[30:24] Verses 9 through 11, and 11 in particular, is a kind of an argument. It's called a how much more argument. Jesus is making a case for you to pray.

And a how much more argument goes something like this. If the Wisconsin Badgers defense is one of the top ranked defenses without their star linebacker, how much more will their defense dominate when that linebacker is back in the game?

Did you get the how much more argument? Let me come in at a different angle. If I feel this good having lost five pounds, how much more, how much more wonderful will I feel if I lose ten?

It's a how much more argument. If we think our times of worship are sweet now, how much more will they be joy-filled when we sing to our Savior face-to-face?

How much more argument? The how much more argument Jesus uses here touches on something that we can all identify with, a father giving gifts to his children.

[31:38] In verses 9 and 10, he just kind of sets it up. He wants us to understand that even though we are sinful at the core, we still have this ability to give good gifts.

So for example, he says, which one of you dads, if your son comes to you asking for bread, will give him a stone? And back in the day, a stone would look like a little kind loaf of bread.

Which one of you guys would give your son a loaf of bread, a stone if he asked for a loaf of bread? And the answer is nobody would. I don't want my son to break his teeth on a stone. I don't want to do that for him.

Jesus' point, nobody, no father would do that. Verse 10, if your son asks for a fish, you give him a serpent. The fish that Jesus is probably talking about is an eel.

I know that eels probably don't appeal to your palate. Apparently they did back in the day. What Jesus is saying is, which one of you, if your son is hungry and asks for a delicious eel, would give him a serpent, a poisonous serpent instead?

[32:48] Who would do that? Jesus is setting up his argument that he's going to make in verse 11. He says this, if you then, if you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

How much more? So this how much more argument is a comparison. And it makes the point by moving from lesser to greater.

And the lesser in this comparison are earthly fathers who have sinful natures. We can still give good gifts. I can give some awesome gifts.

But I'm a sinful man. to Javaolp for troops to Hecpetive ■■■■■■■■■■.

zaf How much more is he able to give good gifts to those who ask him? Jesus is making a case for us to pray based upon God's posture of heart to his children.

[34:14] His ability aimed at us in love. He wants good for us. All right, for the sake of going too far, let me just say this.

Who would give the better gift? You tell me. A father who is limited in his knowledge and in his ability and in his resources with a sinful nature or a father who is unlimited in his knowledge, unlimited in his ability, unlimited in his resources, and does not have any hindrance of sin. Rather, he's fully holy. Which one will give the better gift? Amen. Our Heavenly Father. The good things that our Heavenly Father gives is good things unto holiness, unto godliness. He delights in that. He is postured. He wants you to share in his holiness. I used to think that holiness was boring.

[35:30] And then I started to think about God. And I started to think about how joy-filled God is. He's the most happy person in the world, in creation.

He's also the most holy. God wants you to delight in sharing in his holiness. The good things that we are to ask for are things that pertain to godliness.

So we persistently and with promise persevere in this prayerful pursuit of perfection.

That's what we do. Jesus is showing us how important theology is to prayer. If you think God's a jerk, you're not going to want to pray to him. If you think God is always angry with you, it's going to affect the way you pray with him.

If you think that God spoils his kids, it's going to have an effect the way you pray to him. But if you think God is a heavenly father who gives good gifts according to his wisdom out of love for you and wanting to share in his holiness, it's going to affect the way you pray for.

[36:43] He gives good gifts. Jesus. Jesus. There's one way you can really know that. Because the greatest gift he ever gave is the guy speaking.

Jesus. Our father sent Jesus so that we can be brought into his family. Jesus removed our sin and gave us the right to become children of God.

This use of your father that we see in verse 11, this is the 11th time in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus has referenced God as either our father or your father.

Jesus wants us to know that through him, this God is our father. In his posture towards us is goodness. Ask him.

Ask him for things unto godliness. Ask him. The point of this how much more argument is to compel us to ask.

[37:58] Ask our holy heavenly father and he will give. He will give. There's another how much more argument that I want to make right now.

It's not from Matthew. It's from Romans. Romans 8.32. Listen to this. He, our father, 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?

You hear the how much more argument? If God gave us Jesus, how much more will he give us everything we need for life and godliness?

God wants you to share his holiness. He wants you to enjoy his holiness. Brothers and sisters in Christ, our heavenly father wants to give you good things.

He wants you to ask. He wants you to seek. He wants you to knock. He wants you to persistently, in prayerful pursuit, ask him for things.

[39:10] Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is a call to holiness. And here Jesus is calling us to respond by asking our father for it.

To ask, seek, and knock for it. Now, I can imagine that some of us in this room right now are sitting here and you're saying something like this.

Maybe you're not. Maybe you just, I just need to put it in your head. You're sitting there thinking, I'm not sure if I want holiness. I'm not sure if I want what the Sermon on the Mount calls me to.

How do you respond to that? Ask for your father to give you a desire for it. That God would give you a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

That you begin to see the Sermon on the Mount, not as a pileup of to-dos, but a menu of holiness that you just want to take in.

[40:20] Could you imagine if our church is praying more and more, oh God, would you give me these good gifts so that I can be more and more like you in holiness?

What if it's more and more of us are praying that way? I think we become more and more like him. Now, you may be sitting here too and you're wondering if you're even a Christian.

You're wondering if you are a child of God. Well, if these conditions are true, which I pointed you to in the second point, you have no assurance that your prayers are heard by God on high.

But I'm here to tell you there is one prayer that he will hear. One prayer that he will hear from a sinner. And this is it. It's a prayer asking God to forgive in Christ.

It's simply going to God in prayer and saying, oh God, I recognize that I'm a sinner. I do not measure up to anything in Matthew 5 and 6.

[41:38] Nothing. It exposes me as a sinner. I stand condemned. There's nothing I can do to make me right in your eyes. And the sinner's prayer is this.

Oh Lord Jesus, I receive you as the gift you are. Father, God's gift of salvation to me to forgive my sin and to usher me into the family of God.

Father, would you make me a child? When you ask God that, he will give it to you.

He promises to you. You can bank on that one. So if you're not a Christian here this morning, cry out to God. Ask him to bring you into his family and he promises he will.

This morning, we have this call to pray. To ask, seek, and knock for the good things our Holy Father alone can give. Let's close and pray together for it.

[42:51] Father in heaven, we do thank you so much for sending Jesus on our behalf. Father, we ask that you would give us a hunger and thirst for holiness, that we would want the very thing that Jesus calls us to, to be perfect as you, Father, are perfect.

God, we realize that we can't manufacture that in ourselves. But that is something that you will gladly do. And so this morning, we come asking, Father, we come asking that you would pour out your grace upon us to make us more and more like Jesus.

That we'd be like Jesus in our hearts, in our minds, in our actions. God, we recognize that that we have nothing to offer unto this.

Lord Jesus, you are the vine and we are the branches. Apart from you, we can do nothing. I pray, Father, you would make us humble, dependent people who pray out of a desperation, a desperate longing to be more like our God.

God, would you do a work in us? And we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.