

week #27

Upside Down Aspirations

SMALL
GROUPS

Asking, Seeking, Knocking

“Our Creator will give us all the spiritual and physical resources we need to serve Him if we ask Him in faith.”

Coram Deo

“Our Lord saves us from His wrath in order that we might serve Him according to His law, but we cannot serve Him unless we walk by the Spirit of God.”

Study

Open It
Explore It
Get It

‘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!’ (v. 11). Matthew 7:7–11

Asking, Seeking, Knocking

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson says, “Knowing God as judge has a sanctifying and restraining effect on our lives” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 150). In other words, reflecting on God’s perfect holiness drives us to recognize our own sin and deal with it before we judge others (Matt. 7:1–5). We begin to see who we are — depraved men and women who cannot merit the Lord’s forgiveness. This helps us to be merciful. If our Father in His infinite goodness can pardon us, surely we sinners can forgive others.

However, we still often find it hard to show mercy even when we know the

Lord’s character. We still need wisdom to distinguish between those who will mock the Gospel and those who will not trample upon the good news (v. 6). Moreover, we are in desperate need of God’s help in order that we might live up to the high calling throughout the Sermon on the Mount to be salt and light (5:13–16), obey the law of Christ in heart and deed (vv. 21–48), abstain from hypocrisy (6:1–18), and serve the Lord wholeheartedly (vv. 19–34).

This need is the reason why our Savior returns to the subject of prayer in today’s passage. Living in conformity

to His way is impossible if we attempt to do it in our own power. But if we persevere in prayer, seeking to be empowered by the Spirit to obey Christ with gladness, God will enable us to be faithful to His call (7:7–8). Our Father is generous and kind. He will not trick us and give us a stone that looks like bread when it is bread that we need, and He will not give us a snake if we need fish (vv. 9–10, some Galilean fish look like serpents). **Our Creator will give us all the spiritual and physical resources we need to serve Him if we ask Him in faith (Mark 11:22–24).**



“When the Lord does not give us what we want, let us remember that it is probably because what we want would be harmful to us.”

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:7–11 does not assure us that we will get everything we *want*, only whatever we *need*. We are often unable to tell the differences between these things, but God does not have this problem. If we do not get what we ask for, let us therefore not think He has forgotten us. As John Calvin writes: “We must not think that He takes no notice of us, when He does not answer our wishes: for He has a right to distinguish what we actually need.”

Coram Deo (before the face of God)

We persevere in prayer knowing that our Father in His goodness will never withhold from us what we really need. We also need to recall, Matthew Henry

says, that “we often ask that of God which would do us harm if we had it; He knows this, and therefore does not give it to us.” When the Lord does not give us what we want, let us remember that it is probably because what we want would be harmful to us. Even God’s “no” to us is evidence of His great love for us.¹

Passages for Further Study

Genesis 18:22–33

1 Samuel 1:1–20

Luke 11:5–13

James 4:3

Open It!

1. Take some time to think about your father. What are/were some of his strengths? Weaknesses? What type of relationship do/did you have with him?

2. Was there anything as a child that you wanted but never received? In what ways did you try to persuade others to get it for you?

Read It | Matthew 7:7-11

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. List the three things Jesus wants us to include in times of prayer.

2. What happens when we do these things?

3. What types of things does God want to give His children?

Hindrances to our prayers...

There are at least three things that hinder us from going deeper in prayer. The first is the sneaking suspicion that prayer doesn't matter. It's easy to fall into a kind of fatalism that says "God's going to do what God's going to do." So we stop praying because we think nothing will change. Then there is the fear that we won't pray in the "right" way, that we won't use the correct words or we won't use the right formula and that God therefore won't even bother to hear what we say. Finally most of us struggle with the little voice inside that tells us we've got more important things to do. Prayer is good but we need to get on with the "real business" of the day. So we don't pray as we ought or as we would like. ²



Get It

1. What are you pleased or encouraged about regarding your prayer life? With what area do you struggle?
2. Imagine that your prayers, like those in the Psalms, were recorded for others to read! What would people learn about your view of God?

Asking suggests dependence; **seeking** suggests yearning; **knocking** suggests persistence. Jesus wanted to encourage faith. These verses should not be applied out of the context of the Sermon on the Mount; they are intended for those asking within the "narrow gate" of Jesus' followers. Prayer is to accomplish God's purposes. ³

3. When it comes to asking, seeking and knocking; which attribute of prayer is most incorporated in your times of prayer? Which one seems to be weakest?



(Continued)

4. What are some other biblical principles, besides the three in this passage, that should guide our times of prayer?

5. With each of these three aspects of prayer comes a promise. How can these promises help us to be more active in prayer?

6. When have you seen a fulfillment to the promise of verse 8 in your life?

These are very positive promises, and yet they must be read intelligently, in the light of other scriptures which explain and qualify the words. It is not all asking that receives; for there is asking that is not true prayer. Some ask merely in word, with no real desire in their hearts. Some ask selfishly, that they may consume the divine gift on their lusts. Some ask rebelliously, without submission to the will of God. Some ask without faith, not expecting any answer. Some ask indolently, not ready to do their own part. Some ask ignorantly for things which would not be blessings if they were granted. It is very clear that in these cases those who ask will not receive.

So, too, not literally all who seek find. The seeking must be earnest. There is a remarkable word in one of the old prophets: "Ye shall seek me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." The seeking must also be for good things. If our quest is for sinful things, or for worldly good, that would work in us spiritual harm, God will not give us what we seek. Then we must live right. "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." The thing itself must be good; and we must walk in paths of obedience, or there is no promise of reward for our quest.

In like manner it is not to all knocking that God opens the door. There are timid knocks that indicate neither desire nor faith, as when mischievous children ring a doorbell and then run away, not wanting to enter. It is when we knock at the right door, and knock with expectancy and faith and importunity, that the door is graciously opened. Thus in interpreting this wonderful prayer-promise we must read into the words their true meaning. The asking, seeking, knocking, must be true prayer. ⁴



7. In what ways can the promises in this passage lead people to wrong thinking when it comes to prayer?


8. In verses 9-11 Jesus speaks about a father providing for his children. What point is Jesus making about the character of God?

9. What is Jesus' point in comparing God to evil men?

Our Heavenly Father says no, not because He hates us but because He loves us.

If your child asks for a stone or a snake, will you give it to him? No, no matter how much he begs. Children often ask for foolish things, which are withheld. The same is true with our heavenly Father. As ignorant, willful children we often ask for things that to us seem like fish or bread but which God knows will have the effect of a stone or a snake in our lives. Our Heavenly Father says no, not because He hates us but because He loves us. God's "No" is a sure sign of His wisdom and His love for us. If a five-year-old asks to play with a sharp knife, most reasonable fathers would respond

with a definitive "No" and even let him cry and pout. His tears only show his immaturity. And frankly, if the father does give him the knife, it shows he doesn't really love him at all. In the same way, as God's children, believers often ask for things that might bring us harm, including even things we think are good, like a new job, a better salary, a new house, etc. But God Who Alone knows the beginning from the end, sees through to the end and knows that what we have asked for would harm us more than help us. So in His omniscient, loving wisdom He says "No." ⁵

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10. Why doesn't God just answer us the first time we ask? What lessons can we learn during these times of waiting?

 11. What is the longest you prayed about something before you received an answer from God? What emotions characterized that time of waiting?

 12. What have you prayed for that in hindsight would have been a "stone" or a "snake" had God given you that which you requested?

 13. If you could ask God to do something significant in your life today and knew that He would grant your request, what would your request be? What, if anything, prevents you from asking Him to accomplish this matter at this time?

¹ R.C. Sproul, Asking, Seeking, Knocking *From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org*

² Ray Pritchard, Matthew 7:7-11 Three Levels of Prayer.

³ Disciple's Study Bible.

⁴ J R Miller, The Prayer Promise

⁵ www.preceptaustin.org