

With God's help today, I hope you'll see God meets us most completely when things feel one-sided.

Matthew 7:7-11 (ESV)

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 of you, if his son asks 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!

Our passage today comes at a point where the Sermon on the Mount transitions from its body to its conclusion and links back to the Lord's Prayer in some significant ways.

The Lord Jesus invites us to find him (7-8).

In verses 7-8, Matthew recorded the invitation from God to "ask," "seek," and "knock," wrapped up in a sort of double fulfillment.

But what about when God is hard to find?

These "ask, seek, and knock" prayers are the opposite of those hyper-spiritual, "centering" prayers.

These "ask, seek, and knock" are biblical prayers, raw, real-life, desperate prayers----like the dark night of the soul, hold-your-breath prayers that you've prayed. And often, these moments can feel one-sided.

I know this for two reasons. First, the root of the word *αἰτέῖτε*, here translated "ask," occurs twice in the Sermon on the Mount. Above in verse 5:42, where it is translated "beg," and second, in 6:8 where Jesus teaches us that God knows what we need before we ask.

James 4:3 "You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

The Lord God will never give us something that would keep us from being more like Christ. More than making us happy, God want to make us whole.

Tim Keller summed this idea up this way: "God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows."

Prayers go unanswered because our heart's hardness often keeps us from truly searching for Christ.

There are three lies at the root of human bondage: self-sufficiency; self-autonomy; and self-deceit.

Sin is bondage, and sin conditions the way we ask for things. And to the extent that we are not like Christ in our sanctification, we can often ask, seek, and knock for the wrong things.

We're trapped in this circle of thinking we can fix our own problems until we are brought to a place of despair.

The heart of the gospel is a generous Father who gives his Son who asks, seeks, and knocks for your heart.

Dale Allison: "Fathers do not, as a rule, mock their sons."¹

Matthew 7:9-10 ESV

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?

God does not mock those who are genuinely searching for him, and he certainly does not mock his children who "ask, seek, and knock" for what they need.

Matthew 7:11 , gets right to the heart of the gospel.

Matthew 7:11 ESV

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!

When we first meet Jesus in each of the gospels, each evangelist's chief objective is to show us that Jesus Christ is the gift of God the Father. It is implied by the genealogies and fulfillment quotation in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but John shouted it.

- John 1:12 "12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,"
- John 3:16 "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."

The gospel declares to us and offers to us the free gift of life—a life that we have not earned or built up out of our own resources, a life that we don't need to hang on to at all costs, because it is ours in God, by God's gift of grace.²

You see, when we grasp generosity, we begin to see that God has and will supply all of our needs, and he has done so in Jesus Christ

But, the Christian gospel is also embarrassing lopsided. We are so desperately deceived in our sin, so deluded into thinking we are free that God must place us in refining fire to bring us to a place to rescue us from our own delusion.

Brothers and sisters, you must see that the Christian gospel brings us to a place where our asking, seeking, and knocking is found not in an experience but a person. And, more often than not, we have to be brought to a place of desperation before we will *really* seek the thing we need.

¹ W. D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, in *International Critical Commentary* (1988; T&T Clark, 2010), 680.

² John Webster, *Christ Our Salvation* (Lexham, 2020), 131.

When things feel one-sided, it is because they are. You are brought to a place where you know you cannot get through without the help of another, and gradually, slowly but surely, like good children, we learn that we don't have to pretend to have it together to climb into our Father's lap to hear his tender word to us.

Look at [Matthew 7:11](#)

Matthew 7:11 ESV

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!

This rhetorical question is tender, and it clarifies what we might have originally heard as a command. The Sermon on the Mount is an invitation to whole life, not a list of prescriptions. Here Jesus is not commanding, but he is reassuring. He is concluding his sermon by building up faith and reducing anxiety.

We could, perhaps, summarize this section this way: ask, seek, knock, because when your children ask, you answer. And your Father in heaven loves you, his child, much more than you love your own child. Cease your striving, and know that he has your best in mind.

So, how do we ask, seek, and knock?

Today's text was used by an ancient heretical sect in Christianity, the gnostics, that insisted a genuinely religious life was always asking, seeking, and knocking for the next spiritual experience; the next spiritual "high" so to speak. That marks so much of our contemporary Christian culture today too.

Tertullian commented on these gnostics that their quests proved they cared more about their appetite for experiences than the Christ of the gospels.

He helped his congregation see that Christian asking, seeking, and knocking is limited by subject, time, and boundary. We are to seek all things that Christ taught. We are to seek this as long as it takes. And to stop when we do find it.³

We are to ask, seek, and knock relentlessly. We will find what we are looking for because God is generous to give us his Son. And we'll often be brought to places where our asking, seeking, and knocking looks very desperate. It is after God brings us through these places that we see:

- God will answer every ask, seek, and knock with everything needed to make us whole.
- He will answer every ask, seek, and knock with everything needed to make us like Christ.

Grow Group Questions

1. Mark some of the times God has been kind to *not* give you what you thought you needed at the time?
2. If you feel comfortable, share one of the "hold-your-breath prayers" with you group. How did God sustain you during this period?
3. Reflect on Keller's statement: "God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything he knows." What does this teach us about the heart of the Father for us, his children?
4. How would we know if our "asking, seeking, and knocking" has unintentionally exchanged Christ for a hyper-spiritual experience?

³ Cf., Tertullian, *Prescriptions Against Heretics* [c. 200 AD], in *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome*, The Library of Christian Classics (1956; Westminster John Knox, 2006), 38.