

Ask, Seek Knock

Matthew 7:7-12

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching about the attitudes and behaviour of those who have entered the Kingdom of Heaven. He tells us how blessed those in the Kingdom are, what the law means to us and how our righteousness comes from our hearts and is not about keeping many petty outward rules and regulations, He tells us how we can worship from the heart without putting on a performance, how to keep ourselves from coveting, worrying and judging others and how to give.

Jesus now teaches his disciples more about prayer, although rather than use the word prayer, he talks about asking, seeking and knocking. Many of the things Jesus said were particularly memorable because of the way he put things and this is one of his more memorable sayings. He would have repeated this on many different occasions and Luke records words that are almost identical to those in Matthew, with one notable difference.

*So I say to you:
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;
He who seeks finds;
And to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*“Which of you, fathers, if your (his) son asks for bread, will give him a stone?
Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?
Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?”*

*If you, then, though you are evil,
know how to give good gifts to your children,
How much more will your Father in heaven
give **good gifts (the Holy Spirit)** to those who ask him!*

In speaking about asking seeking and knocking, he makes it plain he is not talking about asking people, searching for a lost item or knocking up a neighbour because we've run out of something. Citizens of the Kingdom ask God, seek God and knock at God's door. God is our heavenly Father who loves us and is concerned about each one of us.

Whatever we might need he first of all expects us to turn to him. This is what prayer is: an expression of our trust in and our dependence upon our Father. And this is why we need to ask. Some times we feel it inappropriate to ask God for stuff, it seems too trivial to bother God, or seems too selfish to ask for our own needs, particularly for things that are beyond our capabilities. We may feel it is our problem, we got ourselves into the mess and so we'll have to get ourselves out, of it; a sense of guilt stops us from asking God. We may even believe that God will not respond to us if we ask him to help us, when it was our fault! We also don't ask because we don't trust God to meet our needs, especially in the area of sickness, so rather than pray, we go to the doctor.

When we were working through the Lord's prayer at our midweek prayer meetings we saw how important it is to ask God to "Give us this day our daily bread." We also looked at the prayer of Jabez "O that you would bless ME and enlarge MY border." This is not sinfully selfish; it is an essential basic prayer for all who are in God's Kingdom.

1. Asking.

Ask and it shall be given to you.. for everyone who asks receives. What an outstanding promise! Jesus' brother, James, takes this up in his letter, but turns it round when he writes, "You do not have because you do not ask". How often is this the case? We don't have because we just don't ask God for what we want or what we need or what we want to see him do. Often when we do ask we ask for the wrong things and with wrong motives. The mystery of prayer is that there's loads of stuff that God wants to give us, many things he wants to do in us, important things he wants to set us free from but if we want to receive any of these we have to ASK!

2. Seeking

Seek and you will find. Seeking and searching is a spiritual action is rooted in the OT where we find over 40 references to seeking the Lord and inquiring of the Lord.

Deut 4:29 "But .. you will **seek the LORD** your God, and you will find *Him* if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.

Isa 55:6 **Seek the LORD** while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.

Ps 34:10 The young lions suffer want and hunger; But those who **seek the LORD** shall lack no good thing.

Ho 10:12 Sow to yourselves in righteousness, Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to **seek the LORD** 'til He come and rain righteousness on you.

This is such an important concept and practice. If we won't take any time and effort in seeking God we won't discover him. We've already seen how Jesus urges us to make seeking his kingdom and his righteous a priority.

3. Knocking

Knock and it will be opened to you. The image is of a closed door, shut tight. In Luke 11 we find Jesus teaching about asking, seeking and knocking in the context of a story about a man who has a visitor and has no provisions. So he wakes up a neighbour to ask him for food to feed his guest. This follows immediately after Jesus' response to the disciples request, 'Lord teach us to pray.' where he reminds them of the pattern prayer we call the Lord's prayer. The point of Jesus' story is persistence. When we pray, if we don't get what we need straight away, keep on knocking at the bloke's door until he gets up and gives you what you need. Persistence!

All three of these images show our need of being proactive. It is no use resting back and saying "God will provide". We have to get serious and ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. Spiritual provision, answers to prayer and blessing are by grace and cannot be earned, but we do need to show God that we are serious, and if we don't ask we won't get what God wants to give us. If we don't seek we won't find the answers and if we don't knock persistently, we will miss out because we gave up too soon.

4. The Holy Spirit.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus speaks of God giving good things to those who ask him. In Luke's gospel Jesus says "How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ASK him." God wants to give us good gifts, but the best gift of all is his Holy Spirit. Why the mention of bread and stones, fish and serpents, eggs and scorpions? Because 'the gift of the Spirit' can sometimes seem strange and even a bit scary or threatening. It is being baptised with the Holy Spirit and with FIRE! If you have never been filled with the Spirit the very idea can seem daunting - we could easily feel "No thank you very much! I'm not at all sure about being taken over by God's Holy Spirit. I don't like losing control. I'm not the sort of person to make a spectacle of myself."

But if God wants so much to give us his Holy Spirit to live inside our bodies and fill us with his presence and his power - could that ever be a bad thing? Would our Father in heaven ever give us something dangerous or evil like a snake or scorpion instead of a fish or an egg?

The gift of the Spirit can do us nothing but good and be such a blessing to us yet so many believers hold back and never ask to be filled with the Spirit. I have come across so many different excuses not to receive the Spirit! Satan loves to hold us back from receiving the promise that the Father wants to give us, often through fear. But let us not fear but come to the Lord and receive the gift of his Spirit, to indwell us, to fill us, to empower us and to fill us with assurance and confidence in him. All we have to do is ASK!

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