

Enter In! 5-9-04

Matthew 7:7-14 (NIV)

⁷“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If 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 to those who ask him! ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. ¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

I think if we are very honest with ourselves, we have to admit that the Sermon on the Mount is one very difficult saying followed by another. Think about it. Jesus said you are blessed when you mourn, are persecuted, insulted and lied about. He showed the law to be impossibly demanding by including what goes on in your heart. Then He tells us we have to love our enemies and live for the next life. If it were not for His consummate example of living what He taught, we would just think the man was a crazy idealist, but His miraculous life beckons to us that there is something much higher behind all that we see. (Hebrews 12:3) His example tells us there is a great battle raging over our souls, and that the best thing for us is to face the reality that He taught. (John 10:10) It is our old nature that balks at the truth He taught and demonstrated. (Galatians 5:17)

If there has been a silver lining behind all that Jesus has taught to this point, it has been the implied heart of the Father behind all these teachings. The hard sayings about mourning, persecution and insult come with the promise of blessing. The examination of the heart implies that God must provide a transformation of the heart. The life lived for heavenly treasure implies that the Father longs to lavish on us eternal blessings. The prayer and promises in this sermon tell us of our Father's heart to provide all our needs. (1 John 3:1)

In our passage today we have the brightest and easiest portion to receive in this whole sermon. Jesus comes right out and tells us what the Father's heart is like. We could see it in the promise that He would supply our food, drink and clothing when we seek His kingdom and righteousness, but we may have mistaken that for give and take. Do this for me and I'll do that for you. That is not the case. It's more like, "Dear son or daughter, this is the way in which I can give you the blessings I long to lavish on you." (Deuteronomy 4:40)

⁷“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Commented [notes1]: ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁷For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. Galatians 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ⁴⁰Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time. Deuteronomy 4:40 (NIV)

Ask, seek and knock. What a promise the Lord has given us in this passage! Do you have a need? Is there a question for which you need the answer? Is there a quality of character that you recognize you are lacking? Ask and it will be given you.

Lest we take this to an extreme that Jesus never intended, let us compare this with the teaching of His beloved disciple John.

¹⁴*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* ¹⁵*And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.* 1 John 5:14-15 (NIV) (also see John 15:7) You might say, "Wait a minute; I liked the blank check!" Well, consider this: if God gave you what you asked for that was not according to His will, it would be harmful for you. Insisting on whatever we desire, regardless of God's will, means that we think we know our needs better than God does. No, it is far better for us to ask for God to withhold any requests that we have ignorantly prayed that are contrary to His will. If you want what is ultimately best for you, then that is a welcome limitation. (Psalms 66:18)

Think of your own children. I remember an acquaintance in Japan that let his 5-year-old boy run around with a sharp knife. When I mentioned it to him, he said if the boy cut himself he would learn to be more careful. "But what if he fell on it and died?" I asked. Sometimes we are just sure that shiny knife is something we should have, so we ask in prayer. Thankfully, our heavenly Father has more sense than that earthly Father. (Mark 10:38)

Imagine the chaos if God gave you everything you asked for. Max Lucado writes, "Can you imagine the outcome if a parent honored each request of each child during a trip: We'd inch our bloated bellies from one ice-cream store to the next..." (from *In the Eye of the Storm*) God's loving concern will withhold that thing that will be harmful to you. Lucado adds, "If God must choose between your earthly satisfaction and your heavenly salvation, which do you hope he chooses? Me too."

James, the brother of Jesus wrote that one reason we don't get what we pray for is because we are asking for something to satisfy our selfish pleasures.

³*When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.* James 4:3 (NIV)

We can think of all the wonderful things we would do with that lottery prize money if we won, but when we do win, all kinds of reasons not to do those things come to mind.

Now, I've told you why we don't always get what we ask for, and why that is a good thing, but don't let that lessen the wonder of this promise. Every thing that you ask for that is good, that is in God's will, God will give you when you ask. He will give it to you in His perfect time and way. Your earthly father may have wanted to give you good things, but could not obtain them. Your heavenly Father doesn't have that problem. (Psalms 50:10) You can't make a request too big for Him to handle.

(Jeremiah 32:27) He is just waiting for you to ask. Ask for the very biggest and best things you can imagine within His will. You know that I picked out the prayers of the Apostle Paul to pray for you. They are some huge requests that as God answers will cause us to be a church that impacts the community in a powerful way for the

Commented [notes6]: ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. John 15:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ¹⁸If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; Psalms 66:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ³⁸"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" Mark 10:38 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁰for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. Psalms 50:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ²⁷"I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me? Jeremiah 32:27 (NIV)

kingdom of God. I know they are God's will. I have the promise right here in His word that the Father will answer those prayers. We will increasingly become a church that loves with the love of Jesus and encourages one another, building one another up. It won't happen because of you or me or even because of who joins this church. It will happen because we ask God for His will to be done. (Jeremiah 33:3)

I trust you are continuing to pray for me, that the right words are given to me. (Ephesians 6:19) Keep praying that I preach in the power of the Holy Spirit with boldness, and that my family and I be protected from the attacks of the enemy. (1 Corinthians 2:4-5) Pray for Pastor Ed's ministry and all the other Bible believing pastors in Sedona. Pray for Pastor Ken's wife who is battling with cancer. Would you also ask that I hear from the brothers and sister in India what I need to bring back to you, and that I share with them what they need to hear? (Romans 1:11-12) Ask and we will receive.

Seek and you will find. Do you need to know God's will in a given situation? Look with expectation, and you will find the answer in God's perfect time. He wants you to know the answer. (Amos 3:7) He's not playing a guessing game with you, or withholding the information you need. The problem is usually that we think we need to know something when it isn't time to know it yet. If you know where you are supposed to be involved too early, your attention will be drawn away from the present task. Think about the times you have changed jobs or moved. Once you found out, the time couldn't come soon enough. Your attention shifts from where you are now to where you are going. Trust that if you need to know, the Father will show you. Seek, and when you need to find the answer, you will have it.

Knock, and the door will be opened. Is there something before you that keeps you from moving forward? Knock, and God will open that door in His perfect time. Two weeks ago I shared with you about living in the holy leisure that Jesus lived in. When you know your heavenly Father is so gracious and good, ready to give you your needs, reveal answers and open doors, you can breathe a BIG sigh of relief. (1 Peter 5:7) It isn't up to you, child. It is up to your Father. You just have to look to Him. You just need to ask, seek and knock. The more you do so at the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the more effective your life will be for the kingdom of God, the more fulfilled you will be, and the greater your reward in heaven will be.

⁹"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If 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 to those who ask him!"

In case you didn't believe Jesus promise, He illustrates why it is true. You wouldn't give your son something bad when they asked for something good would you? If he is hungry you give him some healthy food, not a rock that will break his teeth or snake that will harm him.

Jesus then tells us something about our nature. He says, "If you, then, though you are evil..." "Hey, wait a minute. I'm not evil." Compared to what? Compared to Jesus we are all evil. He just spoke about the evil in man's heart. Compared to us, God is in a

Commented [notes11]: ³Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.
Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹⁹Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,
Ephesians 6:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ⁴My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.
1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ¹¹I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong--
¹²that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.
Romans 1:11-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ⁷Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.
Amos 3:7 (KJV)

Commented [notes16]: ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

whole different league. The Bible calls Him "holy". His goodness is a world above our kind of goodness. If we care for our children, consider how much more your Father in heaven will give good gifts to those who ask Him!

You have probably all memorized by now one of my favorite quotes, "Heaven is filled with answers to prayers that have yet to be prayed." God is just waiting to give you the good things He has prepared for you if you will just ask. Stop for a minute and think about what you really need in your life. Do you need to love your spouse more? Ask God. Do you need patience and gentleness? Ask God. He's waiting for you to ask. Do you need answers in your life? Seek God. Do you need a new direction? Knock on the door and God will open it!

As I was writing this, at this very spot, someone called with a prayer request. Some concern had caused the person a sleepless night. What should we do? Ask God to give them peace. Seek His solution to the problem. Knock on a door that will resolve the problem. Then, we trust that our heavenly Father has heard His child and will take care of it. What a privilege to be a child of God!

¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

So... God is our loving heavenly Father who cares for us so we can be gracious and generous by treating others as we would like to be treated. Because we have access to unlimited resources through our loving Father, we can afford to do to others what we would have them do to us. That is as good as keeping all the laws. If you go back through the laws that God gave to Moses, you will find they all have to do with health, loving God above all else, and treating others with respect and dignity that human life is due because it is made in the image of God. When you treat others as you would like to be treated, you fulfill it all. Love for God is expressed in loving others. (1 John 4:11-12)

Would you like someone to take you to lunch? Take them to lunch. Would you like someone to visit you when you are shut in? Visit someone, and take your time. Would you like someone to help you with medical expenses you can't afford, or a necessity that through no fault of your own you cannot pay? Help pay someone else's bill. This is the golden rule. How little we really practice it, but how different and blessed our life would be if we did.

I would encourage us all to watch for an opportunity each day to do this. You can practice it within your own home first. Watch for God to present needs to you, and meet them without anyone knowing it was you. Husbands, do the dishes without your wife knowing. Children, vacuum when your mom is away. You will find it is more blessed to give than receive. You'll experience the light that fills you when your eye is generous. (Matthew 6:22) Do it as a personal act of worship to God.

¹³"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Commented [notes17]: ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.
1 John 4:11-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ²²The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.
Matthew 6:22 (NIV)

Postmodern philosophy would like to change this expression to read, "Everyone enters the broad gate that leads to life. There is no other gate." They certainly don't want to credit Jesus as saying that few find the narrow path to life. And it is outrageous to them that Jesus would say the way to destruction is broad. They would say, "Surely this was just Matthew misquoting Jesus," but Mark, Luke, and John all quote Jesus as saying something very similar. (Luke 13:24); (Mark 10:25-26); (John 14:6)

It is not by accident that this passage follows the previous one. The greatest thing you can ask for is salvation. The greatest thing you can seek is the kingdom of God and His righteousness. (Matthew 6:33) The most wonderful door you can knock on is the door to heaven. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declared He was the only door to the Father. He is that narrow way. It is generously open to all that would come to God through the way that He provided, Jesus Christ. The problem is most do not want that way. They prefer to ask those who will give them answers they want to hear, answers that will inflate their egos. (2 Timothy 4:3) I should say "we" because we are all people of like nature. It is only the grace of God that draws us to Jesus.

We prefer to seek for some secret wisdom we can be proud about. Who wants to humble themselves and admit that they are evil? We'd rather knock on the door of self-fulfillment and pleasure than the door of service and submission to the King of kings. It is the broad road that leads to destruction, and the vast majority is marching merrily in.

Life, on the other hand, is found in laying down your life. (Mark 8:35) Jesus demonstrated this in such a clear way. He lived it and preached it. In the previous verse He just encouraged us to live to please others, not self. That is only possible when we enter into Christ and find our life in Him. Jesus warned that if we try to save our life we will lose it, but if we lose our life for the One who gave His life for us, we will find life. We will find the narrow gate, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you have swallowed a current cultural trend that has only been popular in just this last 100 years, a mere moment of human history. The reasoning of man has made you want to fit in and not stand out as different. But the clarion call of the One man that truly lived and spoke the very word of God rings through the ages. It is as clear today as it was two thousand years ago because it is alive. (Hebrews 4:12) "Enter through the narrow gate." It is Jesus' loving call to you today as clearly as when He said it 2000 years ago. He's pleading with you not to be deceived by the passing trends of man's current popular ideologies that justify doing whatever you want and calling it spiritual. This narrow gate is laying your all at the feet of the One who died for you and offers you forgiveness and life. The Spirit of God is drawing you to surrender and in surrendering, to find a whole new life. You will either cling to your selfish evil ways and refuse to turn, or you will enter in through the narrow gate.

He won't force you. He does command you, out of love for you. "Enter in!" You are entering one gate or the other. Are you sure you've entered in the narrow gate? If not, be sure this morning. Come to Jesus. Trust in what He did for you. Turn from your sins. Ask for salvation. Seek His kingdom and righteousness. Knock on the door of heaven and it will be opened to you.

Commented [notes19]: ²⁴"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Luke 13:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Mark 10:25-26 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ⁶Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: ³For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 2 Timothy 4:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. Mark 8:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: ¹²For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)