

Generous God and Golden Rule

Matthew 7:7-12

Turn to Matthew 7. Here's an important question: what do you want? What do you really want? What are you after? Jesus said this in Matthew 6: "The pagans seek after those things, but your Father in heaven knows what you need. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and your Father will take care of those other things."

Is the kingdom of God and his righteousness the first priority in your life? Never mind how well you think you're doing, that's not important right now. Never mind if you think it's hopeless, that's not important right now. If you could succeed at one thing in your life, would the kingdom of God and his righteousness be the place you'd like to succeed? Is that your first choice?

We know what the right answer is supposed to be, but that's not important either. No pretending, no false holy talk. If you could succeed at one thing, would the kingdom of God and his righteousness be your first choice of success?

Generous God – Three Promises, Three Assurances – Mt 7:7-8

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Jesus is getting toward the end of the Sermon, he's already starting to wrap this all up, and we need to feel him urging us: "Ask, people! Seek, and knock. Do it! Ask, seek, knock! Why are you not asking and seeking? Why are you not knocking? Ask and seek and knock!"

"Why? You ask me why? Because it with your Father it works! Ask and it will be given! Seek and you will find! Knock at it will be opened! Make sure you ask and seek and knock."

So Jesus has **urged** us, and then he **promised** us we would receive and find. And then he **assures** us in v8: *For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

What are we asking for? Let's begin with righteousness. The fourth beatitude said, *Good news from God for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* That was Mt 5. In Mt 6 he says, *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and your Father will take care of those other things.*

Seek and you will find. Seek first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Narrow the gate, and steep the path that leads to life, and few there are that find it. Seek and you will find.

Here's where I'm going: what if a life that pleased and honoured God was available for the asking? What if a life that delighted God and brought honour to him was ours for the asking?

Let's assume we don't even know what this righteous life would look like. Whatever a righteous life looks like, what we'd receive it if we asked? What if we would find that if we looked for it? What if that gate would open if we knocked on it?

Jesus thinks God is incredibly generous with these things. To Jesus, if we ask the Father for the things he's inviting in the Sermon on the Mount, the Father will give them. There is no doubt whatsoever.

You pray that God will equip you with everything good for doing his will, and that he would work in you what pleases him. You pray like that regularly, daily. And then you assume he is answering you, and doing just what you want.

Let's not be thinking that we'll be heard for our many words. Your Father is not counting your words or minutes of prayer. He's looking to see if you're hungry. And if you're not hungry for this, but you'd like to be, well, ask for it!

And let's not be telling God how he needs to fix me first. Most of the time, God does not need to fix me first. Let's not be telling God he needs to help me get my life together first. Most of the time he does not need to help me get my life together first. You let him decide things like that.

What if he could work his perfect will in you without you feeling any better. Could you live with that? Quite often, that's how it goes.

Our Lord wants us to have real confidence about this. If you're asking for this, you're receiving it; if you're seeking this, you're finding it; if you're knocking at this gate, it's open and you're walking through. This works for everyone, all the time.

Let's not assume we know what our righteous life would look like. Some things we know, some we don't. Let God shape our righteous lives, his plan not mine. The thing is, again, there is no one who is asking for this but not receiving, no one seeking but not finding. No one. Jesus was adamant that this always works.

So, in vv7-8 Jesus urged us to ask, then he promised us God's response, and then he assured us that God would certainly respond, every time. And in vv 9-11, he will assure us again with an illustration from parents and children.

Let's remember that Jesus already taught us what to ask for, he taught us how to pray. *Our Father in heaven, may your holy name be honoured, not mine, may your kingdom come, not mine, may your will be done, not mine.*

What Jesus wants, above all, is that we would have more confidence that our Father is actively doing this through us. Because of who God is, if we are asking for this, he is certainly doing it!

Even Evil Parents give Good Gifts – Mt 7:9-11

“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 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 to those who ask him!”

What seems to trouble Jesus, more than anything else, is that anyone would turn away from kingdom righteousness with hopelessness. That anyone would say, “I would love to seek righteousness in God’s way, and receive the kingdom, but it is hopeless, I could never do that.”

For Jesus, that must never happen. If humans, who are all evil, give good food to their children when their children ask, how much more would your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him. So ask for kingdom righteousness. Your Father will never turn that down.

Luke has this same teaching of Jesus in his Gospel. And he ends with God giving the Holy Spirit. I will read it from Luke 11.

Which of you fathers, if your son 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit. I think God very often answers our prayers by using the Spirit to give us help and strength and endurance. And you might say, “it sure doesn’t feel like the Holy Spirit is doing anything when I pray.” Well, so be it, you don’t feel anything. But that doesn’t mean God’s not working.

Jesus thinks that when we ask, God never does nothing, and God never says “no.” God is always generous with his children, he always acts. We’re not asking for endurance and patience, but he’s sending his Spirit to give us endurance and patience. We’re not asking that our faith does not fail, but he’s sending his Spirit so that our faith does not fail.

Here’s how Paul puts it in Romans 8 - *If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Paul, your logic is good, but look at me! God graciously and freely gives us all things? Look at what a sorry mess I am! If God was graciously giving me all things, would my life look like this?

And folks, that is the right question. If God was graciously giving you all the things you needed, so that your life would look just like he wanted it to look, how would your life look? Do you think you know? What if your life would look pretty much how it looks right now?

Let's put our confidence in God's generosity. If we are asking God to shape us and use us, let's assume he's doing that. God asks us, "what do you really want? What are you after? Where do you most want to succeed?" Remember the prayer of Jesus: "Father, not my will but yours be done."

It was very hard for Jesus to pray that. But he did, and God gave him what he asked for.
The Golden Rule – Mt 7:12

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

The human instinct is this: do to others what they do to you. We don't have to be taught that, it comes out of us. For Jesus, and in the kingdom of God, the starting point is not what people did, it is our compassion for people. If I were in their shoes, what would I like? Jesus says, "do that."

This is an important line for several reasons. The first is obvious – this sums up the Old Testament. You want to obey the OT? Here it is, according to Jesus, in one line.

Second, this sums up Jesus. Near the beginning of the Sermon, he said, *I did not come to destroy the law and the prophets, I came to fulfill them.* If you want to obey the Sermon on the Mount, in a one line summary, *do to others what you would have them to do you.*

This is the last ethical teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. After this we have only warnings, so these words by their position in the Sermon can hardly not be a summary. To be a beatitude person, think about how you'd like to be treated, and do that to others. In everything. If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, how will that look? Above all, like this.

The rest of the Sermon gives us guidance in this, it tells us how this will show itself in different situations, but as much as the Lord can say it in one line, this is the line. When we ask for the kingdom, when we seek for it, when we knock on that door, what will God give us? He will help us live like this, he will lead us to live like this.

In the line right after this, Jesus will say, Enter by the narrow gate. The golden rule is at the heart of the narrow gate.

And now I am feeling poor in spirit. There are ways in which I do this, but there are quite a few ways I don't, ways in which I just protect myself. Let's remember that just before Jesus said this, he gave us five verses on our Father answering prayers and giving good gifts to his children.

Turning us into people like this is a big job. Don't we know it! But our God is a big God, and Jesus knows that. We are selfish, but so were the people listening to Jesus. We're not worse than they were. If Jesus was confident that our Father could get this done in those people, and Jesus had huge confidence in that, then Jesus knows our Father can do this in us as well.

Sometimes I'm not sure I even want to be like this. It is not a safe way to live. But I do love the Lord, and so do you. And when I do not really want to love like this, then I ask the Father for that. "Father, make me hungry to be this kind of person." Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find.

On the other hand, there is much of this already in our church. There hunger and thirst for God's righteousness among us, we do pray, "not my will but yours be done," and we mean it. There is an active desire among us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. You have endurance, and you keep seeking God.

What Jesus wants to leave us with is confidence that God is right now bringing glory to himself through us. He is active in us, producing what he wants to produce. We thought it would be more impressive when that happened, but we often don't know what impresses God. Jesus says, "If we are asking for this, and seeking it, we can be sure he's doing it." says Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER: Father, we've been reading about how confident Jesus was that if we asked for these kinds of things, you would do them. This is our Lord's hope for us, the poor in spirit. It is our only hope, too. But we take him at his word. Thank you for what your power and your Holy Spirit can do in us. Father, help us treat others as we want to be treated. We're asking. We're not good at this, but we're asking. Jesus said you would do this for us. Amen.

BENEDICTION: Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.