

## Learning from the Sermon on the Mount #35 “The Meaning of ‘Ask and You Shall Receive’—Beyond Self-Loading”

Message Notes, October 17, 2021

**Question:** What would your life be like if you had received every single thing that you had asked for?

**Matthew 7:7-11 (LB)** <sup>7</sup>“Ask, and you will be given what you ask for. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks, receives. Anyone who seeks, finds. If only you will knock, the door will open. <sup>9</sup>If a child asks his father for a loaf of bread, will he be given a stone instead? <sup>10</sup>If he asks for fish, will he be given a poisonous snake? Of course not! <sup>11</sup>And if you hard-hearted, sinful men know how to give good gifts to your children, won’t your Father in heaven even more certainly give good gifts to those who ask him for them?”

- Interpretation in context: So far, the previous sections have dealt with hypocritical charity, prayer, fasting, weakness for money, worrying (about finances and reputation), and unconsciously looking at people critically (inner inferiority; projection).
  - These topics show that Jesus is trying to make us aware of our true selves. When we realize what we are truly like, we return to the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount.  
**Matthew 5:3-4** “Blesses are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
- When we examine ourselves in this way, what do we see and what do we hope for?
  - Our own immaturity (poverty of heart) and the depth of our defects (which cannot be removed easily) make us painfully aware of the indispensability of God’s grace.
- As a Christian, have you ever felt disappointment by your lack of growth and struggle to change? That is exactly the issue Jesus is addressing here. He is offering an important concrete recommendation so that we do not give up hope about growing.
  - The Bible calls me a “masterpiece,” but I have doubts about that in my heart.

### 1. Be Aware of Your Own Needs

- The secret to Paul’s power lay not in his will power, but in his awareness that he could do nothing on his own. “What a miserable man I am” (Romans 7:24). He said that because of his awareness of being freed by Christ from his old way of life (Romans 7:25).
- This awareness of not having the power within ourselves to overcome our problems is a prerequisite for receiving God’s grace. **Romans 7:18-25**
- The difference between “sanity” and “insanity”: Sanity is acting based on facts; insanity is repeating the same behavior while expecting a different result each time. Once you realize your weakness, you have to restructure your life so that you do not repeat that situation again. If you fall into your previous pattern, you will never escape from it

### 2. Doggedly Persistent

- “Asking,” “seeking,” and “knocking:” These verbs are all in the present continuous tense, meaning that the actions are continuing and ongoing. Each of the words is repeated to emphasize persistence and tenacity.
- This persistence has to do with not giving up, even after repeated failures that cause you to want to quit. The attitude emphasized is one of getting up again and again, with great determination.
- Jesus encourages us not to give up because of the “constructive pain” (not destructive pain or mere depression) experienced by those who face their ugliness

and pettiness straight on—Jesus calls this “poor in spirit”—because that pain will guide us in the right direction and heart attitude.

- In the parallel passage in Luke, Jesus tells of a man who has a visitor arrive unexpectedly in the middle of the night. Because the man has no bread to offer, he wakes up his friend who was already asleep in bed and gets bread from him to serve his guest. In Luke 18, he also gives the example of a widow who persistently begged for a trial. Jesus encourages us through these stories to never give up.
- In the Old Testament, God’s character is repeatedly described by the phrases, “The Lord is gracious, full of compassion, slow to anger, and rich in mercy” (Psalm 145:8). The reason for this is because He knows that we will fail repeatedly, and that we will grow through those failures.
  - This direction and attitude of the heart are those of one who has faith. Without them, faith cannot grow. What struggles are you currently experiencing? Have you experienced the depth of the Lord’s forgiving love and His mercy continuing to guide you? Have you given up on yourself, believing that God is judging you?
  - It is said that “loneliness is the result of choice.” Where was God when you failed?

### 3. Moving Ahead with the Holy Spirit

- Even if we are imperfect fathers, if we provide good things for our beloved children, our Heavenly Father has even more in store for us of what we need most. He does not give to us things that are better for us not to receive.
- The parallel passage in Luke’s Gospel reveals that the “good thing” is the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 11:13** “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!”
- Why is the Holy Spirit what we need the most?
  - a. “Good gifts” *agathos* is plural and refers to the various gifts and blessings given by the Holy Spirit. They are not exactly what we ordered, but God, who knows me best, gives them to me at the best time and in the best way. There, we will find not only excellent gifts, but also profound significance backed by deep divine care and compassion.
  - b. There is significant meaning to personal communion with God the Holy Spirit.
  - c. Abraham tells us that he went out with the One who told him, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

**Psalm 73:26-28**<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. <sup>27</sup> Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. <sup>28</sup> But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

### Conclusion:

1. What are some things that you have prayed and asked for in the past that you are glad were not fulfilled?
2. How have you reacted in the past when confronted with your own immaturity (poverty of spirit)? In the future, how can you continue to seek without giving up, so that you can experience God’s kindness in a way that only that opportunity can provide?
3. How aware are you of the significance of God’s presence with you? What is preventing you from entrusting yourself and your situation to God?