

# Asking God

The Master Class in Discipleship Series, August 20 & 21, 2022 | Matthew 7:7-11

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How can we possibly do what Jesus teaches in the Master Class on Discipleship?

**“How can we possibly do that?” was the question on everyone’s mind when work started on the Brooklyn Bridge.**

By the mid-1800s, it was obvious that a bridge connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan would be valuable. However, it would not be easy. People asked, “How could we possibly do that?”

To cross the East River would require a suspension bridge to allow ships to pass underneath. The bridge towers would be higher, and the span longer than ever before.

The bridge’s original engineer used steel in the bridge, which made it stronger.

Then they used caissons, underwater boxes filled with pressurized air, which allowed workers to dig at the bottom of the East River as the piers anchored into the ground below.

The bridge took fourteen years to complete.

More than two dozen people died in this construction, including the original designer.<sup>1</sup>

Some things really are difficult, leading to the question, “How can we possibly do that?”

**In Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus seems to acknowledge that the disciple’s lifestyle can seem difficult.**

Jesus has been teaching us the disciple’s lifestyle throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

Disciples are to exhibit the character and values of the Kingdom of God.

Disciples are to have a heart righteousness that surpasses that of the Jewish religious leaders.

Disciples are to demonstrate that kind of surpassing righteousness in relationships.

We are to show that kind of surpassing righteousness in our religious observances.

That kind of surpassing righteousness should lead us to break the hold of money and things over us and declare our complete loyalty to God.

We are to avoid worry by living consciously in today with faith in God.

We are to be people who avoid judging others, and the list goes on.

We want to live that lifestyle. However, it’s not easy. How could we possibly do that?

**Jesus answers the question, “How can we possibly live the disciple’s lifestyle?” in Matthew 7:7-11.**

Jesus seems to pause in the Sermon on the Mount, realizing how difficult the disciple’s lifestyle will be.

As he pauses, Jesus answers the question, “How can we possibly live the disciple’s lifestyle?” Since we want to live the disciple’s lifestyle, we need to pay attention to what Jesus says.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/wonder/structure/brooklyn.html> and <https://www.history.com/topics/landmarks/brooklyn-bridge>

## Does praying persistently help us live the disciple's lifestyle?

### **We could read Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:7-8 as a call to pray persistently:**

*"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

### **Jesus gives us a three-part command and promise.**

Jesus gives us three commands.

Jesus commands us to ask. He implies that we are asking God, but he doesn't tell us exactly what we're asking for.

Then, Jesus commands us to seek. He doesn't tell us here exactly what we are to seek. However, Jesus' command to seek is put right up next to his command to ask, implying that we are once again seeking something from God, likely in prayer.

Finally, Jesus commands us to knock. Something is closed, such as a gate or a door. We don't know what's on the other side of that gate or door. However, Jesus makes it clear that we want what's on the other side of that gate or door.

Jesus' three-fold command to ask, seek, and knock is followed by a three-fold promise. Everyone who asks receives. Anyone who seeks finds, and if anyone knocks, the door opens.

In many ways, this sounds like a call to pray, to keep on praying, and to persist in praying.

### **Furthermore, the Bible encourages us to pray persistently.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:17** puts it simply, "... pray without ceasing ..."

**Luke 18:1** adds this about Jesus,

*And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable about an unjust judge. There was a widow who came to the judge for justice. At first, the judge refused. However, the widow kept coming to him. Eventually, the judge gave her justice so that she would not wear him out.

Jesus asked his disciples if an unjust judge who doesn't want to give justice will eventually give in, won't God, who loves his people, give them "justice," meaning what they need? The answer is implied. Yes. Of course, he will.

Clearly the Bible expects us to persist in prayer.

### **Jesus does not promise us a pony if we pray persistently.**

There's a trope that kids would love to have a pony.

If we read the Bible's teachings very literally, then we could be tempted to think that if we pray for anything long enough and sincerely enough, then we will get what we want, even a pony.

However, Jesus isn't promising us a pony.

Take **Jeremiah 29:13** for instance. It says,

*"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."*

That promise is linked to repentance. After we sin, after we endure consequences, and when we repent, then when we seek God, we will find him. That's not a promise of a pony.

In **Matthew 21:22**, Jesus linked praying and receiving to faith when he says,

*"And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."*

The word "faith" in this case implies a relationship of trust and obedience with God, not blind belief. Our relationship with God matters, a point Jesus hits repeatedly.

**James 4:3** clarifies the issue beautifully,

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*

There are wrong things we can ask for, and we are not guaranteed that we will receive them. Jesus doesn't promise us a pony, even if we ask rightly and keep on asking.

### **However, praying persistently does help us to live the disciple's lifestyle.**

Jesus gives us this command-promise in the context of living the disciple's lifestyle.

He's telling us that as disciples trying to live the disciple's lifestyle, we ask, seek, and knock.

When we ask, seek, and knock, we get what we're looking for.

We get the help we seek to live the disciple's lifestyle.

### **Does knowing God accurately help us live the disciple's lifestyle?**

**We could read the rest of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:9-11 as a call to know God accurately:**

*"Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 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!"*

### **We have all kinds of wrong pictures of our Heavenly Father.**

Some people picture God almost like a golden retriever. He is friendly, always there, and ready to do whatever they want when they want it.

Other people picture God almost like a genie in a lamp. When they need something, they rub the lamp, God grants them a wish, then they put him back in the bottle.

Other people picture God in ways that sound more like the ancient Greek god, Zeus. He's an old guy with a beard, the sky god, and the king of the gods.

Of course, he is powerful. I mean, he's got a thunderbolt.

But Zeus is very busy maintaining power and chasing women.

The ancients thought that Zeus could intervene in the affairs of human beings, but it was rare.

These are the pictures many people have of God.

Jesus repeatedly and decisively challenges our wrong pictures of God and corrects us.

### **Jesus replaces our wrong pictures of our Heaven Father with right ones by starting with human fathers.**

While we all know fathers who are bad, we also know that most fathers at least long to do good things for their children. Jesus reminds us of this fact.

If your son or child asks you for bread, would you give him something else that's round and brown but not bread, something like a stone? The answer is, "Of course not."

Jesus adds, if your son or child asks for something like a fish to eat, would you throw an angry rattlesnake in their lap?" Again, the answer is, "Of course not."

Jesus isn't saying that God is just like our parents. Instead, Jesus is saying that if we who are small, fallen, and evil know to give good things to our children, don't we think that God who is big, powerful, holy, and good will give good things to his children when we come to him?

The answer is, "Of course he will."

### **If I woke our baby son every two hours to feed him, then I know my Heavenly Father take cares of me.**

When our oldest son was born, the doctors wanted us to feed him every two hours.

That meant even during the night which led to a sad ritual for the first six weeks of his life.

We would feed him, put him down, get him to sleep, and then set an alarm for two hours later.

Two hours later, the alarm would go off. I would go to get him, while my wife got ready to feed him. I would pick him up, change his diaper, and get him to wake up. Sometimes this meant putting a cool, wet cloth on his cheeks because he was a sound sleeper.

Two hours later, the process started all over again. For six weeks.

Now, some of you have had much, much more difficult experiences with children.

Just know that sleep is precious to me. It's one of the things I do really, really well. And I need my sleep to function well. And for six weeks I rarely, if ever, had more than two hours of sleep in a row. I was frazzled. I was overjoyed when the doctors said that he could start sleeping longer.

But I did it for my son. Why? Because parents will do things out of love for their children. Even though we are small, fallen, imperfect, and evil.

The good things we will do as parents for our children are just a pale reminder of the goodness and love that God our Heavenly Father has for us.

Jesus wants us to see this picture of God.

### **Knowing God accurately helps us live the disciple's lifestyle.**

We know that God is good.

We know that God cares about us, knows that we need his help, and is ready to help.

The fact that we know God cares about us, knows that we need his help, and is ready to help gives us hope. Why? Because we know that we are going to get the help we need to live the disciple's lifestyle.

### **Does trusting God completely help us live the disciple's lifestyle?**

#### **When we back up and look at the flow of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, we see that what Jesus really seems to be saying is that we need to trust God completely to live the disciple's lifestyle.**

Jesus flung wide open the gates of the Kingdom of God when he said that everyone who hungers and thirsts for righteousness will be filled.

In telling us that we need a righteousness that surpasses that of the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus meant that we need a righteousness that comes from a deep connection with God.

In teaching us about prayer, Jesus called us to see God, who is good, who loves us, who knows what we need, and who longs to hear and answer our prayers.

In teaching us about other loyalties, like money, he made it clear that those other masters dominate us for our harm, while God is the King who gives us life.

Jesus reminded us that God meets our needs faithfully.

Jesus is consistently calling us to understand who God is and to trust him completely.

That means God is going to give us everything we need to live the disciple's lifestyle.

**When he tells us to "ask," he means for everything we need to live the disciple's lifestyle.**

Jesus already showed us what it looks like to ask for what we need. Jesus' model prayer—we call it the Lord's Prayer—shows us the pattern.

We ask for the forgiveness we need to cleanse us from our sins and from our sinful hearts. We ask God to meet our basic needs each day, to protect us from temptation and trials.

These are the things we need to live the disciple's lifestyle, and Jesus told us to ask for them daily in the Lord's Prayer.

**When he tells us to "seek," he means everything we need to live the disciple's lifestyle.**

In his teaching on worry and anxiety, Jesus set the pattern for seeking.

He told us in Matthew 6:33 to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. It's the very same word Jesus uses here.

We are to pray for and seek God's Kingdom, which is God's purpose on earth.

We are to pray for and seek God's righteousness, which is God's purpose in me.

Here Jesus is promising us that if we seek these things first (as in before other things, primarily and consistently), then we will find them.

We will find God's Kingdom; we will be living the disciple's lifestyle inside it.

We will find God's righteousness; his holiness and character will be shaped inside of us, and we will be living the disciple's lifestyle.

**When he tells us to "knock," he means to knock so that the way might be open to everything we need to live the disciple's lifestyle.**

Jesus is implying that we somehow come up against a gate or a door that is closed and even potentially locked.

We will read next week how Jesus describes just such a gate.

Beyond the gate is life. By life, he means forgiveness, adoption as children of God, new life, holiness, resurrection, and eternal life.

Walking through that gate and down that path IS the disciple's lifestyle.

And Jesus says that if we knock, that gate will open.

**God has everything we need to live the disciple's lifestyle.**

Jesus is setting the expectation, "I have everything you need to live the disciple's lifestyle, I will give you exactly what you need."

Plus, Jesus is issuing the invitation, "COME TO ME for what you need!"

Do we trust God completely to help us live the disciple's lifestyle?

Ask, seek, and knock for everything we need to live the disciple's lifestyle.

**The disciple's lifestyle is worth the effort!**

In living the disciple's lifestyle, we know why we were created, that we were created by our good God who loves us, and that our good God created us for a good reason.

While we have sinned and walked away from God, God has not walked away from us.

Jesus Christ died to pay the price for our forgiveness, we are cleansed, and we are adopted into God's family.

We are given God's Holy Spirit, we are continually being made new, we have gifts for serving God, and those gifts have a purpose.

We have a future, no matter how difficult life or the world may become; God wins, and we spend eternity with him.

The disciple's lifestyle is abundantly worth the effort!

**However, as Jonathan Reid can tell you, living the disciple's lifestyle is not always easy.**

Jonathan's and his wife experienced the pain of fertility.

Eventually, their desire for a family led them to fostering and adoption.

At first, the children were just an opportunity to build their own family. In some ways, the children were statistics, as were the families the children came from.

As they began to foster, though, they came to see foster children as real kids who are loved by God.

And they began to see orphans, foster parenting, and adoption as a Gospel issue.

For them, living the disciple's lifestyle has involved giving foster care to thirty children and youths. They have adopted four themselves.

Plus, Jonathan became convicted that there were too few Gospel solutions to this problem. So, he started an agency, Fostering Hope, to bring together Christians and churches to serve foster children and families.

Now, years later, he is the Executive Director of Fostering Hope.<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan's story hasn't been easy. There are many easier pathways he could have taken. Living the disciple's lifestyle is rarely the easiest pathway through life. It's just the right and best one.

**Consequently, Jesus tells us to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking.**

What Jesus says in Matthew 7:7 is somewhat hidden in English.

It sounds as if Jesus were saying, "Ask once, seek now, and knock politely once."

What Jesus is actually saying is, "Ask continually every day, seek as a way of life, and keep on knocking to get everything you need to live the disciple's lifestyle."

Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. This leads to a question:

**What are you holding back that keeps you from living the disciple's lifestyle?**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fosteringhope.org/our-team>

Is there some doubt you're struggling to release? Do you have a difficult time trusting in God? Do you have a difficult time trusting that he knows you, is good, and will help you?

Is there something you're struggling to ask God for? Have you asked before, only to come back empty handed? Deep down do you suspect that the thing you need to ask God for is something that he can't or won't handle?

Is there some commitment you're struggling to make? Do you feel the Holy Spirit convicting you of your need to repent? And do you long to give it up and give it to God? But, at the same time, do you worry about letting go of that part of your life and giving it to God? Does it seem frightening to give up something so precious to you?

**Jesus is saying to us clearly, "Leave it with me."**

After giving that thing to God, you face the real struggle. You'll want to take it back. You'll want to keep it, own it, handle it on your own.

Don't take it back. Don't let it control you. Don't let it stop you.

Set it in concrete as a way to say it's gone. Set it in concrete as a way to say, "I will never take it back."

Set it in concrete as a way to say, "I am always asking, I am continuously seeking, and I am forever knocking."

Are we prepared to do that?

Ask. Seek. Knock. God will help us live the disciple's lifestyle.