



Keep on Keeping On

Matthew 7:7-12

Among the many changes which the internet has made to our lives is the means to experience almost instant gratification as consumers. One well-known internet retailer (you know who) offers customers the opportunity to purchase with just 'one click' and delivery of said items can now be made within hours for those who are willing to pay a sufficient premium.

At first glance, the promises made by Jesus in Matthew 7:7,8 seem to suggest similarly immediate answers to our prayers. But as we look more closely at these verses, we discover that they are inviting us instead into a relationship marked by trust and dependency.

In the original Greek in which Matthew's Gospel is written, these commands come in a tense known as the 'present imperative,' which suggests the idea of a continued attitude to God rather than a one-off action. As one commentator puts it, 'Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking; ask, seek, knock, and keep on doing it.'¹

In verse 8 Jesus offers a clear and compelling promise about how those who seek God in this way will find their prayers answered. He then adds to this promise with a further description of the 'Father in heaven' who he has repeatedly referred to in the Sermon (5:48; 6:7-8; 6:32). Human parents always want the best for their children, and that desire is even greater ('how much more!') for the heavenly Father who knows what is best for us. As Gerard Kelly notes, 'We ask, seek, knock not because we have a magic formula by which God can be forced to bless us, but because we have a loving parent who wants the very best for us.'²

Our reading this week with concludes with the famous 'Golden Rule' of v12: 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.' Near the start of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:17, Jesus has described his mission in terms of fulfilling, and not abolishing, the Law and Prophets, and throughout the sermon he has repeatedly made a connection between how we relate to God and how we treat other people (see, for example, the requirement to forgive in 6:14-15 and the judgements we make in 7:1-5). If they can be summarised in one sentence, this is what the new ethics of the kingdom are about.

Tom Wright has noted that, 'Jesus was neither the first nor the last great moral teacher to offer this so-called 'Golden Rule', and it sums up a good deal of his teaching. What distinguishes him from the many others who have said similar things is that underneath the moral lesson is the love of the heavenly father. What should distinguish his followers, but alas frequently doesn't, is that, knowing this love, they

¹ DA Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exposition of Matthew 5-7*, 1978, 118

² Gerard Kelly, *Humanifesto: A Rough Guide to the Sermon on the Mount*, 2001, 79

should find themselves able to obey this rule, and the other rules that follow from it, gladly and freely. They should then discover that they are able to reflect God's love and light into the world.³

For discussion

1. It was suggested in Sunday's sermon that Jesus, when urging us to ask, seek and knock, is not referring to one-off actions but to an ongoing process. Ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. How does that different perspective on Matthew 7:7 change your understanding of Jesus' command to us?
2. In verse 8 Jesus seems to be offering us an unconditional promise about the requests we bring to God. How can we reconcile this verse with the experience of apparently unanswered prayers which most of have been through at some time?
3. Having previously told his disciples to pray for 'daily bread' (6:11), in Matthew 7:9,10 Jesus refers to requests for bread and fish, the basic and essential diet for most people in first-century Palestine. As we bring our requests to God, how can we know the difference between praying for the things we want and the things we need?
4. How is your perspective on praying to God for the things you need altered by the image of fatherly love which we find in verses 9 to 11?
5. This week's reading concludes, in verse 12, with the so-called 'Golden Rule': 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.' Why do you think Jesus gives us this command at this particular point in the Sermon on the Mount? In what ways might following his instructions in earlier verses lead on to the attitude laid out for us in verse 12?

³ Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part One*, 2002, 74