

Matthew 7:7–11

ASKing for Wisdom:

Ask + Seek + Knock

The Summit Church, Standalone: 40 Days of Prayer Kickoff

MPT: God wants to give you what you need, like a father wants to give his child what he needs, and he wants you to persistently ask him for what you need. What we need most is wisdom.

MPS: Prayer is Jesus' invitation—asking, seeking, knocking—to get the wisdom from God needed to wisely navigate the complexities of life. You can't have wisdom without prayer.

UFN: To have wisdom from above.

Summit College: Fresh10 = 20+ salvation

- SC United: Thursday, Sept. 5 at Brier Creek campus

Matthew 7...

Heard a story about college students taking a test. As time expired, the teacher handed them each an additional sheet and said, ***“Sign your name confirming you did not ask for any outside help during this test.”***

Everyone signed it except for one student who lingered. He said, ***“Wasn't sure whether to sign it or not, cuz I was praying and asking God for help during the entire test.”***

Teacher asked to see his test. Looked it over. Handed him the covenant sheet to sign and said, ***“You can sign the form with a clear conscience ... God did not answer your prayers.”***

40DOP: JUST ASK from **Matthew 7:7**

STAND AND READ

Matthew 7:7–11

⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (Notice ASK = A.S.K. . . y’all wonder why we’re always doing **acrostics** and **alliterations** in sermons: just trying to be like Jesus.) ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹If 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!”

UNIVERSAL FELT NEED: Wisdom

I have a confession: I enjoy Reddit.

If you’re unfamiliar with it, Reddit is like the **community center of the internet**—it’s **vast, chaotic**, and every room is filled with **passionate** and **opinionated** people discussing and arguing over everything from **cat memes** to **conspiracy theories** to **movie plots**. It’s like **digital people-watching** . . . fascinating and scary.

One of the most popular Reddit threads: **Am I the jerk?** People offer up their life situation and ask the internet-of-strangers to weigh in and help them determine whether *they* are the actual problem. It’s a MASSIVE thread—one of the biggest on Reddit. For example (real posts):

- *Am I the jerk for starting my wedding before my mom showed up?*: At noon, mom had to run back to the hotel (30 minutes round-trip) for a 2 p.m. wedding . . . mom showed back up at 3:30 p.m. and was livid. **Is the bride a jerk?**
- *Am I the jerk cuz I told my date she should shower?*: Dude meets a girl online. First date, she’s coming straight from the gym . . . no biggie. Second date . . . plenty of time to shower, decides not to. Third date, she says she’s coming straight from the gym again, so he tells her he’s not in a rush and can meet a few minutes later **if she’d like to shower first**. She insists on not showering. He calls her on it, saying it’s not particularly attractive and it seems to be a pattern. She was insulted because, according to her, she was rushing to try and make these dates happen. **Is he a jerk?**

Now, those are extreme, but we all deal with our own crazy life situations that can often leave us wondering, “Should I have handled that differently? Should I have done this or that instead?” I think this thread is so appealing because it hits on a desire every single one of us have in life: a desire for **WISDOM**. If we’re **doing something wrong** or if there is a **better way to do something**, we all wanna know, right? We all have a desire to live a **wise** and **discerning** life.

CONTEXT

While you may not see it at first glance, this is what Matthew 7 is all about: **Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**

On the surface, this seems like a simple teaching about prayer. But to understand Jesus' teaching here, we have to see it as a part of the larger whole: This prayer is set within the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is the **most famous sermon** by the **most famous person** ... it's Jesus describing how to have the **highest**, most **blessed**, most **peaceful**, **joy**-filled, most **wise** and **discerning** life possible.

And by the time we arrive at Matthew 7, this is the **third time Jesus deals with prayer in the Sermon on the Mount** ... but if we were reading straight through the Sermon on the Mount, you'd see how this one feels kinda out of place and randomly tacked on. It feels like A.S.K. would've flowed a lot smoother with **chapter 6, where Jesus is teaching them the Lord's Prayer: *Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Give us daily bread . . . Got it? Now just ask and it will be given to you!***

But instead, Jesus moves on from the Lord's Prayer in chapter 6, and **Matthew 7** begins with three **seemingly random examples** of how to deal with people, rather than prayer:

1. **(vv. 1–2) Don't judge.** More specifically, don't judge *wrongly* ... don't condemn someone based on your perception.
2. **(vv. 3–5) Before attempting to remove the speck in someone else's eye, take the redwood out of your own eye.** Handle your own business before getting in anyone else's.
3. **(v. 6) Riddle: Don't throw pearls to pigs or give what's holy to dogs.** Torah instruction was sometimes referred to as "pearls" because it was so valuable. But sometimes, people don't want that value, so there's no need to throw our **pearls** before **pigs**.

Relational Complexity: Prayer + Wisdom

Sandwiched between the Lord's Prayer and our A.S.K. Prayer are these three teachings about **navigating the complexities in life**—how we deal with gray areas when we're not quite sure what to do—specifically **relational complexities**.

- *Should I point out the inconsistencies in my brother's life? Is that **judging** or **helping him grow** as a Christian?*
- *Should I help my sister see how her **words** and **actions** don't line up?*
- *How can I even trust that I'm seeing things clearly in the first place? Is this a time to point out some sins in my brother or simply for some self-reflection on my part?*

- *Pearls before pigs: I know this truth would help this person, but I know if I tell it to them it's only gonna fracture the relationship. They're not gonna value or receive anything I have to say. But these truths are so imperative to their health ... should I put the pearls out there?*
- *Is this a time to attempt **intervention** and **restoration** or a time for **boundaries**?*
- *Should I judge? Should I **approach**? Should I **withhold**? How do I deal? Should I? Should I not?*

We read this stuff—[Don't judge. Speck and log. Pearls and pig dogs](#)—*Great, got it.* But that doesn't really give us the formula for what to do at the very moment of life's **complications** and **complexities**, does it?

- There's no **divine flowchart** that details every scenario we'll face: *Should I start my wedding without my mom? Should I tell him he needs to shower more or not?*

What we need to discern these things is WISDOM. And what Jesus shows us in Matthew 7 is that what connects us to wisdom is PRAYER. Jesus is trying to show us that **we can't have wisdom without prayer.**

Here's why that's good news: If Jesus is promising THAT kind of miracle—wisdom and daily discernment in the most complex scenarios of life—**then surely I can trust him with all sorts of other things too.** That's what makes this teaching on prayer so profound *and* practical.

- **Praying for wisdom is asking God to equip you for every other blessing he wants to provide in your life.**

Prayer as a Connection vs. a Transaction

We all know 2020 was insane, but I think the greatest thing to come out of 2020 was the **boom of retailers offering mobile order apps.** *(Frankly, I don't understand people who don't use mobile order where it's available ... And you're welcome to disagree with me on this, just know you're wrong. It's **faster**, it's more **accurate**, it's **easier for the person** taking the order because it's written down for them, it's **cheaper** because you're always racking up points through the app, you don't have to mess with cash or worry about someone skimming your card ... **the benefits are endless.** I don't understand y'all who pull up and stare at a menu that's been the same for 10 years, unsure of what you want. If you wanna spend 20 minutes browsing a menu, go to the Cheesecake Factory. I know I sound like a millennial curmudgeon, but use **mobile order, drive faster** ... and **get off my digital lawn**, okay?)*

Mobile order is amazing because it helps us complete **transactions** in the **fastest, clearest**, most **efficient** way possible.

My fear is that most of us treat prayer the same way we treat our CFA or Starbucks or Crumbl app—like a transaction: God, here's my order. Make it exactly this way. Be ready at this exact time. At this exact location. If you don't—if you're out of something—I'll try going somewhere else.

What happens when we see prayer as a **transaction** is we end up taking prayer promises **out of context** and thinking you just have to **put in the correct formula**. We start acting like prayer is some **two-step authentication** that verifies our **blessing status**.

- But, as **Janetta** at our Garner campus pointed out to me this week, the verbs are “A.S.K.,” not “name and claim.”
- Transactional prayer thinks if we just abide by the right formula, then God will bless us:
 - **Matthew 18:19–20**: “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”
 - *Dang, I guess I should’ve prayed with a partner...*
 - **Matthew 21:22**: “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”
 - *Well, did I not have enough faith? God, I used the correct app. I used my Face ID to verify that I’m your son or daughter. I put in my order, Lord, and you didn’t deliver. What the heck are you doing up there behind the counter?!*

So when God doesn’t answer, we’re **mad at him**, or we think **he’s mad at us**. We wonder if **we had enough faith**, or whether **he’s actually faithful** in the first place. We wonder if we **did the formula correctly** ... or maybe **God just doesn’t care enough to answer me**.

- When we see prayer solely as a transaction, it ends up producing **anger, bitterness, and despair** when God doesn’t answer.
- Especially when we’re praying for something that **seems so obviously good**: *God, I prayed for the healing from cancer; job provision; failing marriage ... why didn’t it work? Why didn’t you answer?*

And those are great and very legitimate questions. But what I’m trying to get us to see is that if we make prayer a **transaction**, then we’re just gonna be **disappointed** and **confused** when it “doesn’t work,” or when the formula fails.

*But what if prayer is more about a **connection** than a **transaction**?*

Who remembers AOL? Growing up, the soundtrack to my life was the sweet sound of [dial up log-on]. The majority of my teenage prayers were that **my parents wouldn’t pick up the landline** and kick me off of the internet before I posted my **away message** with the **perfect song lyrics**.

- Back then (I act like I’m back on the **Oregon Trail** or something and my whole family died when **foraging the river**), your internet used the same line as your landline to establish an internet connection.

See, unlike a transaction (which is one and done), **prayer is the connection**—the ongoing link—between us and God. There’s this **reciprocating upload and download** going on through prayer, giving us access to wisdom that flows out of a deep, personal, communicative, dependent, **connected** relationship with God, who guides us day to day throughout the complexities of life. Prayer is the **connection that bridges the gap** between our **impotence** and God’s **omnipotence**. Our **lack** connects with his **supply**; our **needs** connect with his **riches**.

And the only thing that can kick us offline is ourselves. Here's a few things I often hear about struggling with prayer:

- "Doesn't make a difference." Perceived ineffectiveness of it.
 - Could be from anger or past experiences.
- "Don't think he'll listen to me." Feelings of distance from God.
 - Don't feel like you can approach him boldly.
 - Often stems from guilt or shame...
- "Don't know how." Lack of understanding or knowledge.
- "Too busy." Distractions and busy lifestyle.
 - The average American spends **2.5 hours per day on social media** and an average of **3.5 hours per day watching TV or streaming services.**
 - That's 6 HOURS PER DAY. 42 HOURS PER WEEK.
 - I say that to say: Let's not pretend like we don't have time to pray.
 - **PIPER:** **"One of the great uses of social media will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time."** (Which he posted on social media, which is pretty funny.)
 - Practical for next 40DOP:
 - Uninstall social media
 - Do a Netflix fast
 - Replace phone time with prayer time
 - Replace Netflix with journal/reading time
 - **We prioritize what's important to us.**

If we're going to connect with God through prayer, Jesus gives us three words that should characterize our prayer lives:

1. PERSISTENT

This is about as straightforward as Bible study gets: Jesus tells us to "ask," "seek," and "knock." All **present tense, active, imperative verbs** that imply **ongoing, persistent** prayer rather than **one-time requests**:

- *Ask, ask, and keep asking.*
- *Seek, seek, and keep seeking.*
- *Knock, knock, and keep knocking.*

The Magician's Nephew (Narnia): Aslan likes to be asked.

- Main character, Digory, along with his talking/flying horse, are on a journey that Aslan (the Christ figure) sent them on ... Digory realizes he forgot to bring food.
 - *Surely someone packed food...*
 - His horse says, *"I'm sure Aslan would have, if you'd asked him."*
 - Polly, the girl traveling with them, says, *"Wouldn't Aslan know without being asked?"*
 - To which the horse responds, *"I've no doubt he would ... But I've a sort of idea he likes to be asked."*
 - Aslan knows what you need, but he likes to be asked.
 - God is God, so of course he knows what we need long before we ask for it, but **James 4:2** says, *"You do not have, because you do not ask."*

⁷"ASK, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

I think there's so many things God would delight in giving us if we would just ask. **Kyle Mercer:** **"I don't think we struggle so much with unanswered prayer; we struggle more with unoffered prayer."** It's not that we've completely **disregarded** prayer so much as we've just **replaced** it:

- **Instead of requesting, we go researching.** I need **wisdom**, so I run to Google and podcasts and books and ChatGPT instead of the One from whom all wisdom emanates.
- **We've replaced prayer with meditation:** *Oh, I'm anxious, so I need to focus on my square breathing and emptying my mind so I can be at peace. Quick, take your socks off and stand on the grass to ground yourself with essential oils misting on you* (all fine, by the way). But we've fallen prey to this idea of New Age meditation that says, *"Empty your mind,"* instead of **biblical meditation**, which says, *"FILL your mind with God's Word."*
- **Another way we've replaced prayer is by trading talking to God for talking with others.** Again, we absolutely need brothers and sisters—**wisdom in abundance of counselors**—but we often skip talking to God and go straight to talking to other people about what's going on in our lives.
 - What you need more than a **coffee date** is a **Bible + prayer date**.
 - What you need more than a **vent-sesh** is a **prayer-sesh**.
 - You don't need a **pumpkin latte**; you need a **prayer life**.

E.M. Bounds, Power Through Prayer: **"When faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live."**

- Prayer is like a muscle that's gonna atrophy if you don't use it.
- First, we have to ASK.

⁷"Ask, and it will be given to you; SEEK, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

We seek what's **valuable** or what's **lost**. *Well, what exactly should we be seeking?*

- **Psalm 105:4**: "Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!"
- **Psalm 119:2**: "Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart."
 - Y'all, God ain't hiding from his kids! His heart's desire is for us to **persistently** and **passionately** SEEK him ... and when we do, he promises to be found.
 - **Proverbs 8:17**, God says, "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me."
- Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said in **Matthew 6:33**, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."
 - Seeking God's kingdom means putting God's **plan** and **priorities** before our own ... seeking wisdom on how to prioritize the kingdom at **home**, at **work**, at your **school**, in your **relationships**, and in your **finances**.
 - This isn't about getting **wants** from God, it's about getting **wisdom** to then ask God for what you would have asked for if you knew everything that he knows (as Tim Keller liked to say).
 - Or like **Pastor James Merritt** says: "What we need in our churches today is not a declaration of independence. What we need is a **declaration of dependence.**"
 - And this **desperate dependence** shows up in **prayerful persistence**: Ask. Seek. Then...

⁷"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; **KNOCK, and it will be opened to you.**"

Nobody knocks on a door *one* time ... **one knock on my door and I'm assuming a bird ran into it**. No, when you knock, you KNOCK.

- This is how Jesus tells us to pray. Knock and keep knocking!

The Shawshank Redemption: Andy spends nearly **two decades** digging a tunnel from his prison cell using a **tiny hammer**, chipping away every night.

- That's what prayer is like: Prayer is less like **dynamite** and more like a **tiny hammer**.
- The journey we're invited to is likely not one of **instant breakthrough**. It's more like banging, digging, and knocking day after day—likely not seeing much happen—but the result will eventually be **breakthrough** and **freedom**.

What have you stopped praying about?

- Prodigal
- Relationship
- Healing
- Financial peace

- Sin struggle

2. EXPECTANT

⁸For everyone who asks **receives**, and the one who seeks **finds**, and to the one who knocks **it will be opened**.

Jesus says that "**everyone**" who asks receives. He adds that word so that anyone who is **timid** or **hesitant**—thinking that prayer only works for **super holy, perfect** people—will know that if you are a child of God, then these promises apply to you. (Also, keep in mind it took one humble prayer from a thief on a cross to be saved by Jesus.)

- Now, to become a child of God, you have to first receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior—**John 1:12** says, "**To all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.**"
- If you are not a child of God, then (I say this both **lovingly** but **clearly**) God is under no obligation to hear your prayers.
- But what I can promise you is that if you pray a **prayer of repentance, asking him to save you**, that's a prayer that God ALWAYS hears and responds to with a YES.

If you are a child of God, then you should be praying **expectantly**. **Archbishop William Temple:** "**When I pray, coincidences happen; when I stop praying, the coincidences stop happening.**"

Are you expecting God to move when you pray? Are you expecting God to move over the next 40 Days of Prayer? It was during one of these seasons of prayer that:

- God called **Gabe and Callie Bailie** from Garner to PR.
- God led **Peter and Grace Park** from Downtown Durham to SE Asia.
- God appointed **Craig and Danielle** to South Asia out of Downtown Durham.
- God sent **Logan and Lisa Dagley** from North Durham to Brooklyn.
- God called Hank, Brad, and Doug to start **Raleigh Men's Prayer Group**—Hank prays the gospel ... salvation call ... two dudes saved.
- *Where might God be calling you over the next 40 Days of Prayer?*
- Where are you **expecting** God to move? Expecting God to be faithful to his Word. Expecting God to act on behalf of his people. Expecting God to save. Expecting God to heal. Expecting God to redeem.

3. INTIMATE

⁹Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fishstick, will give him a serpent? (Or asks for a dog, will give him a cat?) ¹¹If 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!

If you're a parent, don't be offended that God calls you evil—he knows all the thoughts you've ever had about your kids ... think about *that*. *Awwwww, my kids are my everything; I've never had a single bad thought. The best moment of your summer was when you sent your kids back to school ... tell me I'm lying.*

Jesus is saying: If imperfect parents like us know how to give good gifts to our kids, then how much MORE will our perfect Heavenly Father know how to give good gifts to those who ask him?!

A.W. Tozer says *the most important thing about you is what you think about when you think about God.*

Our friend **Joby Martin** helped me see this:

- If you see God primarily as **JUDGE**, then you will always be **defensive** and **fearful**, wondering what you've done wrong.
- If you see God primarily as your **BOSS**, then all you'll ever try to do is **work really hard to earn his approval**, because you think that's your job.
- If you think God is just some sort of **COSMIC, DISTANT BEING**, then you might go through **religious rituals**, but they will lack relationship and heart.
- If you think God is only a **KING** (which he certainly is, but he's not only that), then you'll fall into this **legalistic citizenship**, always wondering, *How far can I go without crossing the lines?*
- If you think God is some kind of **HIPPY SKY FAIRY**, then you'll **not squish bugs** and **become a vegan** and think he's impressed with that (he's not).
- And if you think God is like the **OLD MAN UPSTAIRS**, then you'll be on your best behavior when you're at his house—you'll get dressed up, and act all proper, and say things like, *"Shhh, be quiet; we're in God's house ... stop running around."*

Oh, but when you know him as **FATHER**, it changes everything. If we truly saw God as our **Heavenly Father**, then we wouldn't need **tips and tricks** to pray; we wouldn't need a sermon to **guilt us into time with God**.

- If you saw God as Father, you would talk to God as **naturally** and **openly** and **confidently** as my 4-year-old son talks to me.

CONCLUSION

What do you need today from your Heavenly Father? God says, “Ask.”

How’s your relationship with your Heavenly Father right now? Those who seek him will always find him.

What doors are you hoping he will open? He’s telling you to *knock*.

Ask and keep asking.

Seek and keep seeking.

Knock and keep knocking.

...and watch God **do far more than we could ever ask, think, or imagine.**

PASTORAL CHALLENGE

When Jesus was asked, **“Teach us to pray,”** he answered by *praying*.

- **Richard Foster:** **“By praying, we learn to pray.”**
- **Philip Yancey:** **“We learn to pray by praying.”**
- **Mother Teresa:** **“How do we learn to pray? By praying.”**

Make a commitment to **pray as you can** for the next 40 days.¹ Here’s my encouragement for the next 40 days; it comes from **John Chapman:** **“Pray as you can, not as you can’t.”**

- If you can’t pray for 30 minutes, pray for one minute.
- If you zone out, go on a walk.
- If you can’t pray out loud, journal your prayers.
- If you are short on gratitude and adoration, pray your complaints.

Pray as you can, not as you can’t.

STAND + LORD’S PRAYER

**⁹“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.**

¹ [Helpful tips from Tyler Stanton at Bridgetown Church](#)

¹⁰Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,

¹²and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

[For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.]