The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION TWENTY-SIX — Ask, Search, Knock

Part Six: The Two Ways · Texts: Matthew 7:7–11; Luke 11:9–13

The Texts

> **Matthew 7:7–8** *Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*
>
> **Matthew 7:9–11** *Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?… how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

A Wide-Open Door

After the searching mirror of the last session — the log and the speck, the hard work of looking honestly at ourselves — Jesus swings a door wide open. He turns from how we treat one another to how we come to God, and he does it with three of the warmest, most inviting words in the whole Sermon.

"Ask. Search. Knock."

There is nothing guarded or grudging in it. No hoops, no waiting list, no secret password. Just an open invitation to come to God with our real needs — and then, underneath the invitation, the tenderest picture in the entire Sermon: a child asking a parent for bread, and a good Father who cannot wait to give good gifts. If last session was the mirror, this session is the doorway.

Let's search the Scriptures together.

Keep Asking, Keep Searching, Keep Knocking

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened." Notice, first, the three verbs — and notice that they build. Asking is with the voice: you simply speak your need. Searching is with the feet: you get up and look, you go after it. Knocking is with the whole body pressed to a closed door: you keep at it until it opens. Jesus is describing a prayer that is not passive or timid, but active, and persistent, and bold.[1]

And here is a detail the old English hides. In the Greek, all three verbs are continuous — keep asking, keep searching, keep knocking. This is not a magic word you say once and then wait. It is the trusting persistence of a child who keeps coming back to a parent, unembarrassed, again and again. Now, do not mishear this: it is not the babbling manipulation Jesus condemned a

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Matthew 7:7–11, with a parallel at Luke 11:9–13—where Luke's climax is that the Father gives "the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

chapter ago, the piling up of empty words to wear God down. That was trying to change a reluctant God's mind. This is the opposite — the confident, repeated asking of a child who is utterly sure of a Father's love, and so keeps coming without fear.[2]

Would You Give Your Child a Stone?

Then Jesus grounds this bold invitation in the most ordinary and disarming of arguments. "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?" Picture the scene. A hungry child tugs at your sleeve and asks for something to eat. Is there a parent alive who would look down, smile cruelly, and hand over a rock? Of course not. Even the most ordinary, imperfect parent — tired, distracted, flawed — gives their child bread when the child asks for bread. It is the most natural thing in the world.[3]

And then comes the turn — the little phrase Jesus loves, that reasons from the small to the great. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" Sit with the shock of it. Jesus casually calls us "evil" — meaning simply that we are the flawed, self-centered, imperfect people we all know ourselves to be — and says: even you, with all your faults, would not hand your hungry child a stone. So how much more — how much more — will the perfect Father, whose love has no flaws in it at all, give good things to his children when they ask? If a broken human parent gets this right, do you really imagine God gets it wrong? That is the whole argument, and it is aimed straight at the fearful heart that secretly suspects God is stingy, or reluctant, or waiting to be impressed.

A Necessary Honesty

But we have to be honest here, tenderly and plainly, because this passage has been turned into a cruel machine. "Ask and it will be given" has been used to tell suffering people that their prayers went unanswered because they didn't ask right, or didn't believe hard enough — as if the grieving parent, the person still sick after all the pleading, simply lacked the faith to make it work. Hear me clearly: that is a lie, and it is a wound Jesus never intended.[4]

Because look carefully at what Jesus actually promises. He does not promise that you will always get the exact thing you named. He promises that your Father gives good — bread, not

[2]"Ask… search… knock" (7:7): the Greek verbs are present-tense and continuous—"keep asking, keep searching, keep knocking." The teaching commends persistent, not one-time, prayer (compare the persistent widow, Luke 18:1–8). This is not the manipulation Jesus condemned in 6:7 ("heaping up empty phrases") but the trusting persistence of a child who keeps coming to a parent.

[3]The argument is again from lesser to greater (7:9–11): even flawed human parents give their children bread, not stones; "how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him." Jesus assumes the tenderness of God as parent, over against every image of a reluctant or stingy deity (see Session Nineteen).

[4]A pastoral note: "ask and it will be given" is a promise of the Father's goodness, not a formula that guarantees the specific thing requested; Scripture also knows unanswered and differently-answered prayer (2 Corinthians 12:8–9; even Gethsemane). The promise is that a good Father gives good—sometimes what we asked, sometimes something better, sometimes his own presence (Luke's "the Holy Spirit")—never a stone. Unanswered prayer is never proof that one failed to ask correctly or believe hard enough.

stones. Sometimes that is precisely what we asked for. Sometimes it is something better than we knew to ask. Sometimes, as Luke tells the very same story, the good gift the Father gives is his own presence, his own Spirit, to hold us when the thing we begged for does not come. Even Jesus himself, in the garden, asked for a cup to pass and it did not — and no one would dare say he failed to pray correctly. So the promise stands, unbreakable and kind: the door opens, and behind it is never a stone. But unanswered prayer is never, ever proof that you asked wrong or believed too little. It is one of the mysteries we carry, held — as everything is here — by a Father who is good all the way down.

The Confidence to Come

So what is Jesus really doing in these five verses? He is trying to give us the confidence to come. So much of our prayerlessness is not laziness; it is fear — a quiet suspicion that we will be a bother, that God is too busy or too holy or too disappointed in us to want to hear it, that we had better not ask for too much. And Jesus takes all of that and dismantles it with a single image of a child and a parent. You are not a beggar at the gate of a reluctant king. You are a child at the knee of a loving Father, and the door was never locked. So come. Come with the real thing, the actual need, the honest ache. Ask, and keep asking. Search, and keep searching. Knock, and do not stop — not because God must be worn down, but because he loves to be come to.

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and it opens outward in two directions. First, remember what we learned back in the prayer: it is "our Father," never only mine. The confidence Jesus gives me to ask is a confidence to ask for others — to knock on heaven's door on behalf of the sick, the poor, the enemy, the whole aching corridor. Bold prayer is one of the truest forms of love; to intercede is to carry your neighbor to the Father who gives good gifts. And second, notice the shape of the promise itself: a Father who answers his children by giving them bread. We are those children — and we are also, in the Kingdom, meant to be part of how the bread arrives. When I have learned to ask boldly and receive freely from an open-handed God, I become an open-handed person, unafraid to give, because I am no longer clutching in fear. So ask with me: is there a need — mine, or a neighbor's — I have been too afraid or too proud to bring to the Father? *Freedom for others may cost us the pride of never needing to ask — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- "Ask, search, knock" — three verbs that build in boldness. Which comes hardest for you, and why?
- The verbs are continuous: keep asking, keep knocking. How is persistent prayer different from the manipulative "empty phrases" Jesus warned against?
- "Would you give your child a stone?" Where do you secretly suspect God is stingy or reluctant — and how does this picture challenge that?

- This passage has been misused to blame people for unanswered prayer. Why is it so important to hear "the Father gives good" rather than "you always get what you asked"?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. Whose need could you carry to the Father this week in bold, persistent prayer?

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, ask boldly — and keep asking. Name one real need you have been hesitant to bring to God — too small, too selfish, too impossible, or simply too tender — and bring it, out loud, to the Father this week, every day, without embarrassment. Come as a child comes: honest, expectant, unafraid. Second, knock for someone else. Choose one person — a neighbor, a sufferer, even an enemy — and carry their need to the Father each day, persistently, on their behalf. Let bold prayer be a form of love. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, Jesus takes everything we have heard for twenty-six sessions — the whole towering Sermon — and boils it down to a single, portable sentence, the rule you could write on your hand and carry for a lifetime: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." The Golden Rule — the Sermon's summit of ethics, and, Jesus says, the whole of Scripture in one line.

Benediction

So go this week and come to God like a child — boldly, honestly, again and again, with the real need and not the tidy, careful, half-hearted one. The door is not locked; it never was. You are not a bother; you never were. Ask, and keep asking; search, and keep searching; knock, and knock again — not to wear down a reluctant God, but to lean into a good one, who has never once handed a hungry child a stone and never will. And carry someone else's need in with your own. Blessed are those who keep asking, for they will discover, on the other side of the door, a Father who was longing to be come to all along.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION TWENTY-SIX

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. After the searching mirror of last session — the log and the speck, the hard work of looking honestly at ourselves — Jesus swings a door wide open. He turns from how we treat each other to how we come to God, and he does it with three of the warmest words in the whole Sermon: ask, search, knock.

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[Keep asking.]

"Ask, and it will be given; search, and you'll find; knock, and the door will be opened." Notice the three verbs, and notice they build. Asking is with the voice — you speak your need. Searching is with the feet — you get up and go after it. Knocking is with your whole body pressed to a closed door — you keep at it till it opens. This is prayer that's not passive or timid, but active, persistent, bold.

And here's a detail the old English hides: in the Greek, all three verbs are continuous — keep asking, keep searching, keep knocking. This isn't a magic word you say once and wait. It's the trusting persistence of a child who keeps coming back to a parent, unembarrassed, again and again. But don't mishear it — it's not the babbling manipulation Jesus condemned a chapter ago, piling up empty words to wear God down. That was trying to change a reluctant God's mind. This is the opposite — the confident, repeated asking of a child who's utterly sure of a Father's love, and so keeps coming without fear.

[Bread or a stone.]

Then Jesus grounds it in the most disarming argument imaginable. "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, would give a stone? Or a snake instead of a fish?" Picture it. A hungry child tugs your sleeve, asks for something to eat. Is there a parent alive who'd look down, smile cruelly, and hand over a rock? Of course not. Even the most ordinary, tired, imperfect parent gives their child bread when the child asks for bread. And then the turn — that phrase Jesus loves, reasoning from small to great. "If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children — how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask?" Sit with the shock of it. He casually calls us "evil" — just meaning flawed, self-centered, the imperfect people we know we are — and says: even you wouldn't hand your hungry child a stone. So how much more will the perfect Father, whose love has no flaws in it at all? If a broken human parent gets this right, do you really think God gets it wrong?

[A necessary honesty — tender.]

But we have to be honest, gently and plainly, because this passage has been turned into a cruel machine. "Ask and it will be given" has been used to tell suffering people their prayers went unanswered because they didn't ask right, or believe hard enough — as if the grieving parent,

the person still sick after all the pleading, just lacked the faith to make it work. Hear me clearly: that is a lie, and a wound Jesus never intended.

Because look at what Jesus actually promises. Not that you'll always get the exact thing you named — but that your Father gives good. Bread, not stones. Sometimes that's exactly what we asked for. Sometimes it's something better than we knew to ask. Sometimes — as Luke tells the same story — the good gift is the Father's own presence, his Spirit, to hold us when the thing we begged for doesn't come. Even Jesus, in the garden, asked for the cup to pass, and it didn't — and no one would dare say he prayed wrong. So the promise stands, unbreakable and kind: the door opens, and behind it is never a stone. But unanswered prayer is never proof you asked wrong or believed too little. It's a mystery we carry — held, like everything here, by a Father who is good all the way down.

[The confidence to come.]

So what's Jesus really doing in these verses? Giving us the confidence to come. So much of our prayerlessness isn't laziness — it's fear. A quiet suspicion that we'll be a bother, that God's too busy or too holy or too disappointed in us, that we'd better not ask for too much. And Jesus dismantles all of it with one image of a child and a parent. You're not a beggar at the gate of a reluctant king. You're a child at the knee of a loving Father, and the door was never locked. So come — with the real thing, the actual need, the honest ache. Ask, and keep asking. Not because God must be worn down, but because he loves to be come to.

[The thread and practice.]

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: it's "our Father," never only mine. The confidence to ask is a confidence to ask for others — to knock on heaven's door for the sick, the poor, the enemy, the whole aching corridor. Bold prayer is one of the truest forms of love. Is there a need — mine or a neighbor's — I've been too afraid or too proud to bring to the Father? Two things to practice. First, ask boldly, and keep asking — name one real need you've hesitated to bring to God, and bring it out loud, every day, without embarrassment. Come like a child: honest, expectant, unafraid. Second, knock for someone else — carry one person's need to the Father each day, on their behalf. Let bold prayer be a form of love.

Next time — Jesus takes the whole towering Sermon and boils it into one portable sentence you could write on your hand: "in everything, do to others as you'd have them do to you." The Golden Rule — and, he says, the whole of Scripture in a single line.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and come to God like a child — boldly, honestly, again and again, with the real need, not the tidy, careful, half-hearted one. The door is not locked; it never was. You are not a bother; you never were. Ask, and keep asking; search, and keep searching; knock, and knock again — not to wear down a reluctant God, but to lean into a good one, who has never once handed a hungry child a stone and never will. And carry someone else's need in with your own.

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