

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to see the world of the poor, the neglected, the war-torn and the abused. Help us to appreciate the world not from our own point of view, but from the view of other people; and may we have a big enough compassion and understanding to live in a manner worthy of those who have been called to be Your disciples, the agents of Your Kingdom here on earth. We ask this in Your Name: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Thanks for Life

Each of us has been born into this world and given our lives and individuality by the Spirit of God. Praise the Lord for the work of the Holy Spirit in making us, and giving us life!

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for close friends
- Pray for those who are employed to work in extreme conditions
- Pray about the politics which lie behind energy production

Meditation

Sing a song of praise to God!

Sing it over and over again,
And let the melody capture your heart;
Feel the joy, let it soar away
In praise of Him who died for all!

Sing a hymn of praise to God!

Let each verse inspire your soul
With radiant happiness, unconfined;
The awesome majesty of our God
Proclaims the liberty of our world.

Sing a psalm of praise to God!

Sing with people wherever you are;
With saints of very age who've found
The Word of God within their hearts,
As Christ has drawn them closer still.

Sing a song, a hymn, a psalm,
To Christ, the living God of love!

Bible Study - Matthew 7:7-14

⁷ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock at the door, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and everyone who knocks at a door, it will be opened!

⁹ Now, is there anyone among you, who if your son asked you for bread, would give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, would you give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, whilst sinful, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask of him!

¹² *'In everything therefore, do for your friends what you wish them to do for you; for this is the law and the prophets.*

¹³ *'Enter through the narrow gate; because the gate is wide and road is easy that leads to complete ruin and many take it, ¹⁴ but the gate is narrow and the road is difficult that leads to life, and there are few find it.*

Review

Today's passage is another powerful and well known passage. The first saying (7:7,8) is a wonderful reminder of the relationship we may have with God the Father in His Kingdom, and it emphasises 'asking', 'seeking' and 'knocking at doors'. All three words are fascinating because they are exactly the response Jesus expects to the news about the Kingdom of God. It is natural that people should 'ask' what the Kingdom is and what it will do for them, and that they should 'seek' and enquire what it might mean for practical life and relationship with God. Then, because the announcement of the Kingdom faces people with a challenge, some will respond by 'knocking on the door' of the Kingdom with a desire to enter. You may object to my interpretation here because this text does not actually mention the Kingdom! However, the entire Sermon on the Mount is about the Kingdom of God, and unless we read each part of it accordingly, then we will wildly misinterpret these great sayings of Jesus!

The rest of the sayings (7:9-14) are also well known, but not as much as the first. In fact, the three passages which follow verses 7 and 8 explain in turn the three key words used by Jesus. In verses 9 to 11, Jesus speaks about what it means to 'ask' the Father for something, telling us about the parental heart of God and His desire to give! In verse 12, Jesus quotes a well known phrase called the 'Golden Rule' ('do for others what you would have them do for you'), which explains what we should seek in the Kingdom of God. Lastly, Jesus illustrates what it means to open doors and go through, though He speaks about 'gates' both wide and narrow, and the choices they represent.

It is very important to spot this structure within the teaching of this passage, because unless we do, then we will be left taking these words completely out of context. For example, the first saying; 'ask, and it will be given to you ...' was not designed to give us permission to ask for anything we want, or parade our faith according to whether God answers our prayers immediately and in the way we want! Intrinsically, most Christians understand this, but when faced with a simple sentence such as verse 7, are tempted to ask God for what they want and hope their faith is big enough to get what they want! This, of course, is not what the Lord had in mind. As Jesus goes on to explain, the Father longs to give us not what we want, but to be Himself the answer to our real needs. This is clear in Luke's Gospel where it says 'how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!' (Luke 11:13).

The saying 'do for your friends what you would have them do for you' (7:12) is Jesus' version of the rabbinical teaching 'do not do others what you would not wish them to do to you ...!' Jesus turned this from a negative to a positive saying, but what does it have to do with 'seeking'? Basically, it disqualifies any greedy attitudes which may arise following the previous verses. If anyone thought that 'asking' was a means of getting what they wanted from God, then this saying is a summary reminder of common decency and the equality of all people before God, the great provider. The Kingdom is not about getting what we want, but about sharing everything so that no-one suffers, and each person acts according to what they would have done for them. There is no clearer equality than this!

It is abundantly clear that the 'narrow gate' in verse 13 is the gate of entry into the Kingdom of God. It is a door which does not just open itself to us, so we have to knock, and we have to make a specific choice to enter otherwise we will not cope with the demands of the pathway before us. Being a narrow door, we have to exercise care. We all know that courtesy and politeness are required if a number of people are to get through one door, and such civility should follow from our choice for God and His Kingdom.

It is possible that when Jesus said these words, He thought of Moses, who declared at the end of his great sermon (contained in Deuteronomy) to the Israelites as they stood on the brink of the Promised Land, 'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life' (Deut 30:19); and Joshua, who challenged the people, 'choose this day whom you will serve ...' (Josh 24:15). God is always hoping we will respond to His love. His desire is that we make the same choice as the people of Israel under Joshua and Moses; to enter the Kingdom, the new 'Promised Land', by the narrow gate which as we will discover in the rest of Matthew's Gospel, is Jesus Himself.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Have you ever come to God with a real need for something material, believing that this passage of scripture means that if you ask, God should give? Why do things work or not work like this?
2. Is the 'Fatherhood' of God something that helps you understand His love? If not, why not, and how do you understand verses 9 to 11?
3. Have you made positive choices about 'entering' the Kingdom of God, or does the scriptural picture of knocking on doors mean something else to you?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There are always times when people will come to the Lord with a cry of help and in genuine need; unless the Lord helps them, no one else will. The Lord longs to respond to such prayers, but how can we expect Him who shows no partiality (Rom 2:11, Gal 2L6 etc.) to show partiality to us? The Lord treats all people equally, and when I come before the Lord to ask for something for myself, I try to bear this very much in mind.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Do people find faith in your church? If not, why not, for that is its purpose! What part can you play in enabling people who seek, to find the Kingdom of heaven. How can you be the Lord's agent for opening doors to those who knock?*
- *How does this passage challenge you personally? It is an easy passage to talk about, but a hard one respond to, so if you find yourself wondering how to deal with some of what is said, speak to a leader at your church about this.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us all to be patient with life. If things do not go well today, may we offer them to You and wait on tomorrow for better. If people have frustrated us today, may we be refreshed tomorrow and have the staying power to remain calm with them. In this way, translate a small part of our faith into action; through Jesus Christ our Lord; AMEN