

Mt 7:7-12

7 "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

"Ask & it will be given": It's not an isolated concept – there's a parallel passage in Luke 11:9-3; and similar ideas are found in Mt 18:19, 21:22; Mk 11:24; Jn 14:13; 15:7,16, 16:23; Jas 1:5, 4:2; 1 Jn 3:22; 5:14. Part of basic theology is learning how to count – if something's repeated a lot, it's probably important.

I once heard a long time ago some guy go over how to differentiate ask from seek from knock, but I've forgotten it all except that the guy thought they were different, and I tend to agree with the commentators that say it's just a literary form using near repetition – seen in the Proverbs a lot.

The repetition also implies continued asking/seeking/knocking. In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus told a parable about a woman who was denied justice and how she unrelentingly hounded a judge until he gave in, just to get her off his back, and then related that to how God wants us to "bother" Him in the same way – He wants us to wear Him out with our persistence.

Before we cover what we should be asking for, let's hit what it is not:

Word-faith – the idea that "God will only act when we ask." Horrible theology. All of His best stuff He came up on His own w/out us. Truth, beauty, righteousness, humor, generosity, love, galaxies, stars, planets, forests, fresh air, animals, chocolate, revelation, incarnation, resurrection, forgiveness, atonement, redemption, Heaven – all without any input from us. I don't think He needs our guidance.

Prosperity gospel - Aside from simple experience showing us that asking to get rich doesn't work, we have Heb 13:5 Let your character be free from the love of money, (being content with what you have: for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU. NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU."). John couples that same idea with a warning in 1John 2:15 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Look at the model prayer – among requests to Glorify God, to ask for His will, forgiveness, & protection from sin, we are told to ask for our "daily bread". It's OK to ask for basic provision, but our goal is not to (Mt 6:19 Do not) lay up for (y)ourselves treasures (up)on earth (where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.) Instead we are to (Mt 6:33 "But) seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you, because (Mt 6:21 for) where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

James 4:3-4 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses [as the bride of Christ, what else do you call us when we chase not Him?], do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Instead we are to do what John says in 1John 5:14 (And this is the confidence which we have before Him,) that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

There's comfort in this. We're promised that if we chase after good things, we *will* receive them. (v8 talks about 'everyone', 'he who seeks', 'to him who knocks', with no qualification other than that you ask.)

So if we are to ask with right motives & according to His will, what are we to ask for? Looking at v9-11, it's obvious that we are to ask/seek/knock for good things – His kingdom & righteousness. God's "stuff".

9 "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone?

10 "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?

11 "If you then, being evil [matter-of-fact. BOLD!], know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

I'm a sinner - evil, stubborn, and self-centered. But when when my kids ask me for something they need that's good for them and I can provide, I'm not going to turn them away. So if I, being evil (like Jesus just said I am) can do that, how much more can we expect the all-powerful and all-good God of the universe to give us what is good for us? We have His guarantees that He'll give us good things like:

- **Eternal life:** If we ask in the way He tells us to, and not in the way we make up on our own, we have His promise that we will receive it. Jn 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
- **Forgiveness:** 1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- **Wisdom:** James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
- **Righteousness:** Mt 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
- **Peace:** Phil 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So if we are promised all these great things, why isn't everything always sunshine and roses? It's because good in my life is not about achieving my goals, but God's. God's goals for me are sanctification, being conformed to Christ, a useful instrument for Him, not health, wealth & prosperity. He's aiming for holiness, not happiness. There's some hint of this in the Phil passage I just read – we can and should ask about everything that concerns us, but the promise is for peace.

Jesus compares a fish to a snake, & a loaf to a stone. A fish has some resemblance to a snake, and some stones can look a lot like a small loaf. But we're not fooled by these and we don't give them to our children. In the same way, God knows some of the things we ask for are counterfeits – they have a skin-deep resemblance to something good, but they are dangerous. He doesn't give us artificial superficial “good”, but genuine good.

When your 4-year-old asks for ice cream for dinner, he sincerely believes that it's a good idea, but you know it's not. You make him eat some broccoli so he doesn't wreck his health. When we ask God for wheelbarrows full of cash, thinking “surely that's a good idea”, He knows it's not & instead might send us some financial hard times to discipline our souls so we don't wreck our spiritual health like Lindsey Lohan, Charlie Sheen, or [fill-in-the-blank] celebrity.

So when Paul asked for what he thought was a good thing, God recognized it as a fake and instead gave him what was genuinely good:

2 Cor 12:7-10 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

The good thing that God gave Paul is not relief from suffering, but the result of suffering - to keep him humble, to demonstrate grace, and to display the power of Christ in a weak human.

Paul talked about the value of suffering in Rom 5:3-4 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.)

If every time we had trouble we could just ask God to take it away & He immediately would, how would we learn the perseverance that Paul talks about? If that was the case we'd be more likely to learn that God is our lackey who does our bidding. We need to expect that suffering will continue sometimes, to gain perseverance, proven character, and rightly-placed hope.

It's easy to see it's a blessing when God gives us something pleasant like health or a good job or a car that starts every morning. But we need to see that He never gives out stones or snakes – when He gives us something hard like illness or unemployment or a house burnt down, it's *still* a blessing.

Rom 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those

who are called according to His purpose. God does not endorse or condone sin. It's evil. But the brilliance & miracle of God is that He orchestrates the activity of Satan with the brokenness of a fallen world & the lives of 6 billion people so that even when evil is done or occurs, He uses that evil to bring about blessings, hard blessings, in the lives of His people. When Satan attacks, Job shows us that he goes only as far as God lets him, to bring about the result God wants, which He *promises* is for our good. Martin Luther said "The devil is God's devil", and if I can add to that I think He keeps him on a short leash.

Hard blessings are still blessings. This is rough to grab hold of, but an all-powerful all-good God doesn't leave us much choice. Is 46:9-11 (Remember the former things long past, For) I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; 11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.

If God is the absolute sovereign of the universe, and He desires our good, then we have to agree with Peter in 1Pe 4:19 Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

If you are suffering, it's because God ordained it, and it's good.

Lam 3:38-39 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That **both good and ill go forth**? 39 Why should any living mortal, or any man, Offer complaint **in view of his sins**?

"in view of his sins?" - that's key for our understanding. We have rightly earned Hell. Anything short of that, no matter how bad we think it is, is mercy. We deserve eternal conscious torment, but instead He gives us hard blessings, and we complain about them. It's painful when the Dr. cuts out most of the cancer & then burns away the rest with radiation or chemo – why should we expect it to be any less painful when He burns away arrogance, lust, pride, anger, selfishness, conceit, worry and the litany of other sins that we insist on holding on to so tightly? If He loves us He's going to purify us.

C.S. Lewis: "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you know that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of--throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. *He intends to come and live in it Himself!*"

Paul puts this into perspective in 2Cor 4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

Remember that in this *same letter* Paul tells about his "momentary, light afflictions":

2Co 11:23-28 (Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so:) in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.

But he can call them 'momentary & light' because of Ro 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

He's not saying these things aren't hard, but that they pale in comparison to what's to come. I'm not saying that suffering isn't hard, either. But we need to not ignore that our sufferings are, in fact, blessings ordained by God.

Jas 1:2-3 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your

faith produces endurance. ... 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. ...

We need to keep the goal in mind – God is working everything out for the benefit of the believer, for the Glory of God.

You remember that Joseph's 11 brothers sold him into slavery, and from there he went into prison, but he told them in Ge 50:20 (“And as for you,) you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Or you can look at just about anything from Voice of the Martyrs. Last month's magazine (April 2011) had an article about a 14-year-old Vietnamese girl jailed for a month for worshiping – she was tortured, made to stand on nails, and beaten with a rubber hose. She said “It's not an accident that the Lord has in His plan to allow me to go through testing so that my faith can be stronger.” In a video interview on their persecution.com website, one of the Christians in Pakistan asked us to “Pray that the persecuted Christians are happy and thankful in their persecution.”

So what is it that these people have or understand that lets them see things this way?

Most of us know at least some of the story of Horatio Spafford – He lost his only son, 4 years old, in 1871, the same year he was financially ruined by the great Chicago fire. In 1873 the ship carrying his whole family sank, leaving only his wife alive. How could he write “*It is Well with my Soul*” as he traveled to meet her over the spot all four of his daughters, ages 2 thru 11, drowned? V3!

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

He had been transformed by the gospel. I'm sure he appreciated his material blessings, but either before the great Chicago fire or thru it, God taught him that his hope was in Him, not his stuff. I'm sure he loved his children and mourned them, but before their loss or thru it, God taught him that his hope was not in family. His hope was in Jesus, not the things and people He had blessed him with. And he was confident that God was going to bring him through this hard blessing.

Our best example is Jesus. Sin and the fall brought Him tremendous suffering, and His unwavering obedience through that suffering brought Him the greatest glory.

Phil 2:8-11 (And being found in appearance as a man,) He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

As our example, He prayed for relief, and so did Paul. We've already gone over that God wants us to wear Him out with our requests. But when He says “no,” we have no standing to object. Our job is also unwavering obedience. If God has ordained that sin in this world brings suffering in your life for your benefit, are you going to tell Him that He made a mistake? That He's not all-powerful, or not all-good, or both? “God you really blew it this time”?

The indictment of A. W. Tozer is “Among the plastic saints of our times Jesus has to do all the dying and all we want is to hear another sermon about His dying; Jesus does all the sorrowing and we want to be happy.”

He rescued me His enemy, the slave of His enemy, to make me His son. This great thing cost Him dearly. Is it wrong that good things might cost me? Php 1:29 (For) to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

In summary - when we come to Jesus we receive the great blessings of salvation & eternal life. The good blessings come too, and they are often easy blessings, but God is not unfaithful if they are hard.

APPLICATION:

- 1) No more saying stuff like “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade” - life doesn't give us lemons. God gives us blessings that are sometimes hard. Don't scorn them.
- 2) Jesus meant it when He commanded us not to worry. We worry about “bad” things happening, but for the Christian, God promises “bad” things bring blessings.
- 3) If some tragedy comes into my life, it's good & right for me to pray for God to fix it. God will be faithful & good to answer in a way that benefits me, just not necessarily in the way that I want.
- 4) Evangelism should be redemption-focused, not blessings-focused. We might get pleasant & easy blessings, and we often do, but they aren't (or at least shouldn't be) why we come to Jesus. Remember Paul's “light afflictions”, or Hebrews 11:35-37 (Women received back their dead by resurrection; and) others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated. To tell someone “God loves you & has a wonderful plan for your life” or “Come to Jesus – He wants to bless you” is deceptive - It's absolutely true that He'll bless & protect us, but that means *US, our souls*, not our plans, or stuff, or health, or even our lives. The person you're witnessing to doesn't understand he might be given the awful blessing of cancer.

The great commission tells us to go preach the good news to all nations. We can assume then that it's applicable to all nations. Can I preach the “wonderful plan” and “He wants to bless you” in N Korea, where the average life expectancy of a believer is 3 MONTHS after they start witnessing? If it can't be preached in all nations, it's not the good news, and it shouldn't be preached in any.

So what do we preach? The gospel – sin, repentance, faith, & forgiveness. Ray Comfort's parachute analogy - “put it on because it will make your flight more comfortable” vs. “put it on because this plane's going down”.

12 "Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

1- “Therefore” → Back to v9-11: God is good to us, *therefore* we should be good to others.

We are all God's creation (not children). We are equal in dignity & importance. To think that we trump somebody else is sin, because it's a failure to recognize the God-ordained place we hold in the universe – under Him, and alongside our fellow humans. Phil 2:3 (Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind) let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;

2 – There's no contradiction with Matthew 22:37-40 And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ 38 “This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ 40 “On these **two commandments** depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” Our verse in Mt 7 says that just one commandment, loving other people as you would want others to treat you, is the “Law and the Prophets”. There is no contradiction because loving your neighbor in that way assumes a love for God. Without a love for Him you can't “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If we keep the commandment to love others, that demonstrates love for God. Joh 14:21 “He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.”

3 – Bear with me, I'll get to the point in a few pages: This isn't a radical new command from Jesus.

C.S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man* compiled a list of cultures which had come up with rules for moral behavior very similar to Judeo-Christian ideas, including some that sound something like the golden rule. They were

Babylonian	Chinese	Egyptian	Greek	Hindu	American Indian
Indian Indian	Norse	Roman	Stoic	Anglo-Saxon	Australian aboriginals
General kindness to others			Special kindness to family		Duties to parents & elders
Duties to children & the next generation			Justice		Honesty
High-mindedness			Good works		

In *Mere Christianity* Lewis goes on to point out that no culture honors cowardice, betrayal, or cruelty, but they

venerate bravery, loyalty, and generosity (at least in other people). He said “Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might as well try to imagine a country where two and two made five.”

Lewis called this the “tao”, to use the Chinese word explaining it. We generally call it the natural law. Antagonists will offer this as evidence that Christianity is not unique, but the Bible explains it perfectly in Rom 2:14-15 (For) when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.

Even though we're fallen, we still have a basic inborn understanding of morality because we are moral beings created in the image of a moral God. Why should it surprise us that it has been codified by various cultures around the world? Now, because of the fall it's become a distorted understanding that let's people say kooky things like “How can a good God _____?”, but even that is proof that some understanding of morality exists in their God-denying hearts.

It's not just this command – there's nothing radically new in any of the morality that Jesus taught, especially considering that the Jews had the benefit of the OT. Not even “love your enemy & pray for those who persecute you”, which isn't directly found in the OT, had the foundation for it laid there with Lev 19:18 (You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall) love your neighbor as yourself; (I am the LORD.) and Pr 25:21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. He made finer points, and His teaching was better developed, but it didn't stray from what God had already put in our conscience. If you grew up with a a finger-painted copy of the Mona Lisa in your house and then one day you went to the Louvre & saw the original, you wouldn't think it's a new picture, but you'd immediately recognize it as the same familiar lady, just more detailed & understandable & beautiful & better than what you already knew, just like the masterpiece of revelation is better than the smudged copy in our hearts. A God-fearing Jew hearing Jesus speak wouldn't be thinking “Whoa, where'd that come from?!” but “WOW! I've never heard such clarity on this subject before.”

It's like He polished up the mirror of the OT law so that if we had somehow deluded ourselves into thinking that we are keeping it, the sharper image shows us irrefutably that we are not.

What is new is not the righteousness He taught, but the perfect righteousness He lived. What was radically new is His offer to impute His righteousness in us, to credit it to our account before God, if we repent and put our faith in Him, and that we are saved by the goodness of God alone & we cannot add to it in any way.

I'm not sure who named it the “Golden Rule”, but I'd rather they had called it the “Silver Rule” - it's not the crowning achievement of Christianity or the greatest Christian distinctive. If it were the best we could do then the world would be right in saying that all religions basically say the same thing, and Jesus would be what they tell us He is – a good person, cut from the same cloth as Buddha or Confucius or Ghandi.

If we're going to call something our “Golden Rule”, let's make it

- Ga 3:6 (Even so) Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.
- 2Co 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- Ac 20:21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

W/out repentance & faith, the “Golden Rule” just pulls us back in to my other sermon on Matthew 5 where we're looking for what good thing we can do so that we can tell God on judgment day what righteous people we are, but that will never work because Heb 11:6 (And) without faith it is impossible to please Him, (for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.) But *with* repentance & faith, it's Heb 13:16 (And) do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

The difference is faith – if we've trusted Jesus alone for our salvation, God sees our efforts through the filter of His Son and is pleased. If we haven't, we're just trying to bribe the righteousness judge of the universe into giving us a pass, and our payment is heaps of filthy rags.

SUMMARY

Sermon on the mount, Golden rule – great stuff, useful to Christians as a goal & a guide & a curb, but it's not the gospel; it's not our hope. If your hope is in living up to these great standards you are going to Hell. He didn't come to preach this sermon, He came to die: Mt 20:28 (just as) the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Your only hope is the gospel, that the one who gave this sermon lived it & died to impute His righteousness to you if you repent and put your faith in Him.

APPLICATION (Other than it's not our hope):

We need to be careful how we handle the Sermon with lost people – we don't preach it to them except to show them how far they have fallen short of it & how great their need is for the gospel. We're not called to tell sinners "live this way." And if we did, and they somehow managed to pull it off, we'd just be responsible for sending a happy well-adjusted man to Hell. We are called to show sinners how they cannot live this way, and therefore they need to repent and trust the Savior.