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Series: The Sermon On The Mount
Message: Our Gracious Father

Transcribed Message
July 15, 2018
Matthew 7:7-11

You know, there's something that children learn pretty early in life. I think it's something that we probably carry with us for most of our days. In some respects, it is pertinent especially to young children. They may learn early on that when you really want something, you need to remember two cardinal rules. You need to keep in mind who it is that you're going to ask and you need to keep in mind when you're going to do the asking. Those two are very crucial. Children learn early on and they have to figure out depending perhaps on the ask. Are they going to ask dad or are they going to ask mom? I might rephrase that and just simply say the rule probably is just ask mom if it's at all possible. For an unscientific survey, how many of you grew up in an ask dad home? This is not good, dads. I take it the rest of us all grew up in an ask mom home? That would've been my experience. Ask mom if you really, really want something and you hope she doesn't say you need to go ask your dad. That was always the last thing you wanted to hear. That might have been considerations for children. They might be considerations for older people as they grow up and find themselves in different circumstances. Who to ask. When to ask.

We have a wonderful passage before us this morning that takes us into the spiritual realm of asking. It reminds us that as God's children, we don't have to worry about who to ask or when to ask as if one time might be more favorable than another. Jesus simply says when you need something, just come and ask and He will indeed listen.

Let's look at Matthew chapter 7 again this morning. We are moving through this last and final chapter. I want you to follow with me if you would in Matthew 7 and verses 7 through 11: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for

bread will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If 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.” I would say this morning what we have before us in these verses is simply this. God delights in giving good gifts to His children. All you have to do, all we have to do is come and ask.

Let's look this morning. First of all at pray like you've never prayed before. What I want to do is as we look at this is remind you that Jesus said more about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount than any other topic, any other subject. In fact, as you know, Jesus said a lot about prayer beyond just the Sermon on the Mount. But in the Sermon on the Mount, we have more verses devoted to prayer and to the theme of prayer than we have any other subject. So this is something that is very important in the eyes of our Lord in communicating to us His heart and desire. If we're going to understand what is going on in this passage, as least I see how this is unfolding, the very first thing we need to do is we need to look at the context. There's a rule of thumb within teaching and preaching that says a text without a context is a pretext, which is simply to say if you don't observe the context in which verses are found, you can take those verses and pretty much make them mean and say about anything you want them to say. A text without a context becomes a pretext to teach about anything you want. It is especially true with regard to a passage like this – one that seems very open ended in terms of what it is that we're asking in this passage and yet I believe there's a context.

I want to ask you to look first of all at where in the sermon we find this particular passage. If I were to ask you where do we find this passage, you would likely as you have seen this unfold say it's near the end. We're winding up the Sermon on the Mount. This particular group of verses dealing with prayer comes near the end of Jesus's teaching in this whole discourse. I think that's important because what we have said with regard to the Sermon on the Mount is this. Jesus is communicating to us how it is that He lived his life. This is like a snapshot of the life of Christ. Matthew 5, 6 and 7 really unfold for us the answer to the question how did Jesus live His life? The answer to how to He lived His life is very much in these verses. We use that as our theme. This is Jesus telling us how we're to live, how to live life well as a child of God. It's right here. When you think back through what we have looked at, we go back to chapter 5 and

remember the Beatitudes. The challenging words that we found in the Beatitudes. Then we went to the similitudes and Jesus calling us to be salt and light in the midst of this world where the light of Christ and the saltiness of what it means to be a follower of Christ is to be evident. I think the whole point as we've gone through this hopefully has been this is in some respects to unsettle us.

This is in some way to say are you living life like this? Are you living a life at this level of passion and desire in obedience to Christ? Could you be accused of being a Christ follower based on what people see in your life? As we go through this, what we should have been saying almost on a weekly basis is this just rocks my world in terms of how it is that Jesus is calling me to live and where I often may find myself in trying to do that. We look at this and then we come to the passage that we just looked at last week. We're unpacking and unfolding all this and then we come to those amazingly challenging verses in Matthew 7 in which Jesus said don't judge lest you be judged. We looked at that last week. I don't know about you, but I'm willing to confess that one of the easy places for me to go in terms of disobeying what God has said is right there. It's very easy to just make a judgment about somebody that I don't really know a whole lot even about. This is where my heart so easily goes. I just make a snap decision about why somebody's doing something or why they're saying something. In the midst of that call to be not judging but rather to be discerning, we come to these verses. It seems to me this has a context. That context should say to us what is my response to everything that Jesus has said to this point? Matthew 5. Matthew 6. Half of Matthew 7. Hopefully we're honest enough to say who in the world can do this? How in the world can Jesus expect me to live like this? How is it that the life of Christ can be realized in my life? I think that's exactly where Jesus wants us to be. When we come to verses 7 through 11, I don't look at this as just a random set of verses having to do with prayer. I very much think that there is a context in which these verses are set. That context has been unpacked before us. In effect Jesus says to us in light of everything I said to this point you guys need to be praying like you've never prayed before. You need to be asking God to do what He alone can do in your life to realize this life that He wants you and I to be living. The gifts that He intends for us to have and to share with in regard to how it is we live our life day-to-day is right here before us in these verses and chapters.

It begins in verse 7 with this command. and that command is ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened. So who is in view when Jesus makes this statement and offers this command? I would say to you that it's not just anybody and everybody. Again we have a context. We're talking about God's children. The "you" of verse 7 isn't just any "you". It's isn't just anybody. This is an invitation that Jesus gives to those who rightly call God Father. In verse 11, when He talks about the Father, He is talking about people physically in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When Jesus says that as He does and we looked at this back in the 6th chapter and the 9th verse when He taught us how to pray, we began by saying our Father. We're acknowledging that we're in a relationship with God. Everybody isn't in a relationship with God. They may think they are, but unless they put their faith and trust in Christ, they're not in this family that Jesus is addressing and talking to in these verses. So it's not just anybody and everybody.

I think secondly as a part of that it's those who are in God's family, but that's simply not enough to leave it there. It must be stated as well that it is those who are walking with God in obedience. What we're going to unpack in verses 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 isn't just for anybody and everybody. It's for children of God by faith in Christ. It is those who have determined as best they can by faith to walk this Christlike life with God's enabling power and help. It simply will not do to be walking in disobedience to God and praying and asking God to do things in our life if we're in a position and stance before Him which is one of disobedience. That shouldn't be too surprising, right? 1 John chapter 3 verse 22: "And whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him." When the psalmist says in Psalm 66 in verse 18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart (if I regard sin in my life), the Lord will not hear me." It doesn't mean that God suddenly becomes less than omniscient. Of course, God always knows everything but he is talking about our relationship. If I decide that I'm going to walk in disobedience to God in this area of my life but somehow I want His blessing over here, it doesn't work that way. We are called upon to walk in obedience as best we can in every area of our life. We're not perfect and we're going to fail, but we acknowledge that and we move forward. This command comes then first of all to those

who are in God's family and those who have made a commitment to walk in obedience to God.

So what are we to do? He tells us. how are we to pray? I want us to see two things that He says about how it is that we are to pray. The first one is we are to come with a sense of intensity. Come with a sense of intensity. You see it in these three words. This group of verses I know is familiar to most of us. We've seen this and probably heard about this on many occasions. We are first of all to ask, which of course denotes that there is a need. We have a need so we come to our Father. We have a need and we believe that He can meet that need and so we come. The very first thing we do is we ask. In asking, we're making a declaration of dependence on the one that we come to. It is not a declaration of independence. That is what we normally find. It is a declaration of dependence. In fact, this word "ask" is particular in that it is often used of someone asking someone superior to them in terms of position for something that they need. If you just think in terms of a king in a kingdom, if somebody within the kingdom is coming to the King and asking for something that they think the King can do for them. That's the word that Jesus uses here.

Secondly, we're to seek. We're to seek. We ask and we seek. It reminds me of the parable Jesus tells in Luke 15. The woman loses a coin. It's a valuable coin and she probably doesn't have much. She's seeking but the picture doesn't just say that she's seeking. Jesus visualizes it for us. She gets her broom and she sweeps her entire home so desperate is her desire to find it. She is seeking with an intensity that this speaks to the fact of her desire to find this coin that she needs so desperately.

Then the last thing of course is to knock. Jesus, as you may remember, told more than one story, more than one parable about knocking. In fact, in most of those cases, the storyline had to do with praying and had to do with praying with a sense of intensity. It had to do with the idea of somebody knocking and not just knocking once but there was that continuous knocking.

Look at this with me and I want you to see in these three verbs just a couple of things that I think are helpful. I don't think the whole story rests on these, but I think they do give us some insight into what Jesus is wanting us to see here. We are to ask. We are to seek and we are to knock. Many people have pointed out there's something of an

ascending sense of order in this progression. There is a progression here. You begin with a simple asking. You begin by simply making a need known, but you don't stop at that point. You ask and then it's as if you move to another level. The intensity that is required in this case causes you to seek. There's action with that verbal request and desire for whatever it is that you need.

Then finally there is asking, there's acting and then there's keeping. Keeping on by knocking. If you look back at Matthew chapter 5 and verse 6 when Jesus said Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. This came to my mind as I thought of Jesus saying ask, seek and knock. Jesus could have simply said if you're hungry for righteousness, then you'll be satisfied if you seek after God. He could have simply said if you're thirsty and you're thirsting after righteousness and you seek after God, you're going to be satisfied. But He brought most of those together, which I think was to intensify what was going on there. You are thirsting for righteousness. You're hungering for righteousness. Jesus deliberately links those ideas together to speak of the intensity that should be in our heart. I clearly think that's what He is doing here. You're asking but you're not satisfied with just asking. You're seeking. You're going to another set of actions. Even then you're not satisfied. You're knocking and you're taking it to yet another level.

Here's the second thing that is often pointed out. These all are verbs. All three of these are verbs. This command is given to us in these three verbs: ask, seek and knock. What we have here is a present active imperative. The present tells us that Jesus is talking about an unlimited period of time. In the Greek language, there were choices that could be made in terms of how it is that they wanted to put the tense forward. If you wanted to say something and you were talking about perhaps a one-time thing and you were talking simply about a point in time, you would use the aorist sense. Jesus doesn't do that. He specifically uses the present. The present speaks of something that is continuous. It's ongoing. If you say to your kids, please clean up your room. If you say it in the aorist tense, they're just to clean up one time. But if you say it to them in the present tense, they're going to continuously keep the room clean. There's the insight you parents may not have realized. You were saying these things in the aorist and that's what they were hearing. And now you can go home and explain that

you really meant it in the continuous tense of the present. You always want their room to be kept clean. That's what Jesus says here. Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. This is not a one-time event. This is not something that you do one and done. You keep on this. We've already said it's active.

But the last thing has to do with the fact that it's an imperative and it's a command. Jesus commands us to do this. This is the will of God for your life is the way we say those things. When we come across imperatives of the New Testament, we say this is the will of God for your life, that you keep on asking, that you keep on seeking, that you keep on knocking. What does that underscore? We move from intensity and prayer to secondly to come with the spirit of persistence. Come with the spirit of persistence. If you think about that for a minute, Jesus says come and ask and keep on asking. Come seek and keep on seeking. Come knock and keep on knocking. so there's intensity and clearly there's the idea of persistence. At some point when we think about that, the question that can come to our mind at work and want to grapple with is why? Why?

Why is it that Jesus wants us to be persistent in prayer? Why do we need to be so persistent in prayer? Is it because God is more likely to respond if He hears more words from us? Is there something that God doesn't know about our circumstance and if we keep telling it over and over He's going to get it and He's going to be informed? Maybe He'll hear it that time and maybe previously He hadn't? Are we trying to convince an unwilling Father to do something on our behalf that He doesn't want to do? So we keep asking and we keep seeking and we keep knocking because we have to convince God to move in our favor? We know that all of those are wrong. We know none of those hold the answer to the question why is it that God wants us to be persistent in prayer? I think the answer is far less about God and far more about you and me. We're not trying to moving an unwilling Father to give us a good and perfect gift. We're not trying to inform a detached deity about something that He knows nothing about. We're not trying to overwhelm some God with more and more words until finally He hears us. I think what Jesus is saying to us here is a revealer of our heart. It reinforces this sense of absolute dependence on God.

We're by nature independent people. We're by nature thinking that we can do this, that we can handle this. We come in and out of God's presence in prayer with this request and that one. No, what Jesus says here is you need to be persistent in prayer. What do you think would happen if every time we asked God for something one time we got it every time? There's a lot of things that would happen and most of them aren't good. We would very quickly find ourselves viewing God as some kind of a magic genie. The Aladdin's lamp. We have a request, a desire, a need. We have a want. Just ask and you get it right away. It's not the way God has constructed this relationship that we have with Him. There is to be passion. There is to be intensity. There is to be persistence.

It reminds me of the story of a little boy and his dad. Bed time. We've all been there. You go through the routine, right. Take him to bed. Go through all of the storybooks, the Bible story book. You answer a hundred questions. Get a drink of water. You give kisses and hugs. Say good night several times. You get the whole routine laid out. You leave the room and you go sit down in the family room for a little rest and peace little quiet. It isn't very long before you hear: Daddy? Can I have a drink of water? No, son, you've already had your water. It's time to go to sleep. A little time passes. Daddy? Can I have a drink of water? No son, I've already told you. You had your water. It's time to go to sleep. I want you to be quiet. A little bit later. Daddy, please! Please can I have a drink of water? This is getting a little exasperating. Son, I've already told you, you're not getting any more water. If I hear anything else from the room I'm going to have to come back and I'm going to have to spank you. In a quiet little voice. Daddy, when you come back to give me a spanking, can you bring me a glass of water? And that's when the dad knows that the kid is really, really thirsty.

Here's what we need to see in this matter of intensity and persistence. It's in a context. It's in a context and in that context we are praying and we're asking God for His help. What You have shown me through Jesus in this sermon, I can't do this. I can't overcome some of these things in my life without Your help. I can't live the way that You have laid out the life of Christ without Your help. That to me is what Jesus is telling us and ought to be in view when we look at these verses, when He says to us ask, seek and knock. I think specific to the context. Now there is a broader context in which this

can be applied, but I think the specific issue at stake is our spiritual lives and how it is that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus calls us to ask and see and knock with this teaching in mind.

My heart goes back to the beatitudes. Am I poor in spirit? Do I mourn over sin? Am I meek and humble? Do I hunger and thirst? Am I merciful? Am I pure? Am I a peacemaker? Do I rejoice in persecution? That's just the beatitudes. There's a lot to pray about right there. And then if you just go on through. God, You've called me to be salt and light. You know how hard it is to live different in this world today. I can't do this without Your help. He talks about anger. God, you know the problem that I have just reacting without thinking. God, You told me not to lust in my heart, not to look at things that I shouldn't be looking at. God, I can't do that without You. So I'm asking. I'm seeking. I'm knocking. God, You talk about divorce and what happens in a marriage when we don't pay attention to the things we need to pay attention to. God, help me in my marriage relationship, to do those things that You've called me to. Father, this matter of retaliation. I find in my heart a tendency to want to strike back and say things that I shouldn't say against somebody who does me wrong. God, I have a hard enough time loving people in my family yet You call me to love not just my neighbor but you call me to love my enemies. I haven't even gotten to chapter 7 yet! And then I get to chapter 7 and God through this instruction says stop judging people. You don't know what's going on in their heart. You don't have any idea what they're dealing with. All of this unfolds before you get to Matthew 7:7. In Matthew 7:7 Jesus says this is what we are to do. Ask, seek and knock. And do you know what we do? We keep on asking. We keep on seeking. We keep on knocking. We're asking God to do something on our behalf.

Now look at the promise in verse 8. The promise in verse 8 is this: "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." If you include verse 7 because Jesus says a very similar thing in verse 7. With verse 8 the equation of these two verses together there are six times that Jesus promises to answer this prayer. Six times He says if you ask then you're going to receive. If you seek, you're going to find. If you knock, it's going to be opened. Two times for each one. One thing is certain. God wants us to understand that He is ready and willing to answer this prayer in our life if our intense, passionate, persistent prayer is

God, change me and make me more like Christ. It was Calvin who said: "Nothing is better adapted to excite us to prayer than a full conviction that we shall be heard." It takes us right to James. James chapter 1 verse 5: "You have not because you ask not." Again, what's the context? The context of James 1:5 is just in the verses before. James had talked about having joy as you fall into various trials. Then you get to verse 5 and it is like God, I've got to have your help here. I can't do this on my own. It's very similar to what we have in Matthew chapter 7.

Now so we don't miss the point, look at the illustration. The illustration begins with the question in verses 9 and 10: "Or which one of you, if his son asked him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?" the central point of this illustration and maybe of this entire passage has to do with our view and understanding of God as our Father. That's what Jesus is pressing home here. What father doesn't delight in giving good gifts to his children? Every father who is properly disposed in love for his children is anxious to give a good gift that they think will be of benefit in the life of their child. One of the great blessings of my life, and Bonnie's too for that matter, was we had godly fathers who when we came to them and had a request and asked them for something, we knew whatever they answered it was out of a heart of love for us. We never had to wonder if the reason that they said no was because of some ill motives. No, they loved their children. If the request was in keeping with something that would be of benefit and a blessing, they bestowed freely, graciously, generously. If they didn't think that it was, then of course they would say no. but the point was we came to a dad who we knew at the end of the day had our best in mind. Jesus says that's the kind of Father you have, only infinitely more. How does your heart beat for your child, parent, grandparent? How does your heart beat for your child? How does your heart beat for people you love in your life? All you have to do in answering that question is then take it to infinity with how God views you and how He sees you.

There's a contrast here. That contrast in verse 11 says this: "If 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!" It is the lesser to the greater argument. Jesus is simply pointing out that our Father will always give us what is best. He is saying to us that our earthly parents are not perfect. The idea of the word "evil"

here is simply to say that we're fallen. We're sinners. Earthly parents make mistakes. Earthly parents sometimes give something to a child that isn't going to be for their benefit. They do it out of the best of motives but it doesn't work out that way. Our Father in heaven? That will never happen. He never makes mistakes.

Now, as we close listen to this. In the gospel of Luke, this same group of verses, this same teaching about asking, seeking, knocking unfolds and this is the way Luke brings together the last part. Luke says in the 11th chapter and in verse 13: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" Here's the point that I simply want to make. Luke substitutes the good things that we're asking of our Father with the Holy Spirit. It's almost a synonym. The good things that we're asking of the Father come to us as a person, the Holy Spirit. Father, I call out to You for comfort. Here's the Comforter. Father, I need Your help. Here is the Helper. Father, I need wisdom. Here's the Spirit of wisdom. Just go down the list. I want to be holy as You are holy, Father. Here's the Holy Spirit. Father, I want to walk in truth. Here's the Teacher. Go through what it is that you and I need in terms of the good things that are going to result in growing in Christ. They are found in the greatest gift that God has given to us, the indwelling Spirit of Christ that He bestows upon us the moment we put our faith and trust in Christ. We're baptized into the body of Christ by faith. That is our assurance this morning.

If we ask for anything that is going to be spiritually good, our Father is going to give it to us. Do you want to be a better husband? How often are you intensely, passionately, persistently asking God to make you a better husband? Do you want to be a better wife? How much time so you spend persistently, passionately pursuing that desire before God? Pick anything that you want, my friend, right out of the Sermon on the Mount or out of any other part of Scripture. Say God, this is a need in my life. I'm going to ask, seek and knock because I know You're going to give it to me. Anything. Anything that promotes Christlikeness in your life, anything that propels you to greater righteousness He is going to give to you.

It reminds me of that prayer that we looked at the last few weeks. I'm praying this prayer for our body every day. That we would worship with an undistracted heart. That

God will reveal the wonders of His Word. That He would deepen our faith and joy in the gospel. Cause us to treasure the church. That we would build each other up. That we would love and adore the gospel in our lives. Protect us from evil people and ideas. Guide the leadership of our church. Equip us for mission. Deepen our longing for Christ's return. You pick any one of those and Jesus says if you ask, seek, and knock I'm going to give it to you. So I'm encouraging and challenging you to do the same. What is it in your life that needs the touch of God's Spirit so that you can live a life that is more like Christ? Start asking.

Here's what we take away. There's no greater request to ask of our gracious Father than this. Grow us in Christ's likeness. Grow us in godliness. Grow us in righteousness. Ask and you will receive. John Newton wrote this great statement: "Come, my soul, thy suit prepare. Jesus loves to answer prayer. He Himself has bid thee pray; therefore, will not say ye nay. Thou art coming to a King. Large petitions with thee bring. For His grace and power are such. None can ever ask too much."

My prayer for everyone here this morning first of all is that every one of us knows what it means to be in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. I pray to that end that before this morning is over, you will make that wonderful discovery by means of the gospel, that what Jesus did on the cross He did for you and He did for me and trusting in what He did to forgive us of our sins is God's answer. It is the good news, the greatest news. For all of the rest of us, is that we would know and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father God, we are thankful for this wonderful promise from the life and words of our Lord. May it spur us on, Father, to love and good deeds and may those good deeds be an intense and persistent prayer that You would make us and conform us after the image of Your Son. We pray all of this in the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen.