

Matthew 7:7-12

Ask. Seek. Knock

Let's talk about grammar. English sentences follow a specific order: subject, verb, direct object. Variations of that pattern are rare but not extant. Consider Matthew 7:7, a verse well known by many Bible readers. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." What is the subject of these three clauses? Who is asking? Who is seeking? Who is knocking? Likewise, what is the direct object of these clauses. What is the subject asking, seeking, or knocking? This grammatical mystery makes the interpretation difficult, but not impossible.

First, consider **The Pursuit** (vv. 7). Scholars have long reminded biblical readers that "a text without a context is a pretext for a proof-text." The same is true for verse 7. The Sermon on the Mount is a well-structured passage which means that the command in verse 7 fits the broader argument of the sermon. The main thesis of the sermon regards the secret to the blessed life found in Christ and enjoyed in God's Kingdom. The blessed life is not one of religion or rebellion, but one sold out to Christ, his Kingdom, and his righteousness. Those who live for God's glory enjoy the blessed life whereas those who live for their own glory or for the approval of others will not discover the secret to the blessed life. This passage fits squarely within that broader argument.

The structure of this verse may be grammatically odd, but not unique. Most English sentences follow the Subject, Verb, Direct Object, but not all of them. Imagine if someone was standing in the middle of the road and a bus was heading toward them, I wouldn't say, "Dear sir, move away from the bus." I would say, "Move!" Beginning a sentence with a verb, though odd for the English speaker, places the emphasis on the verbs – Ask, Seek, Knock.

These words are not arbitrary. Notice that they are sequential increasing in intensity. They are also synonymous. They are all terms meaning "to pursue." The Greek also emphasizes their persistence. Translations could render verse 7 as saying, *keep* asking, *keep* seeking, and *keep* knocking.

This means that the blessed life is not automatic. I came across a video featuring two friends in a conversation. The first noted they didn't feel good and were lacking energy and motivation. Their friend then asked a series of questions. "Have you drank water today? Are you getting rest? When was your last vacation? How much time do you spend on your phone?" The point of the video is that health is not something that happens. It isn't automatic.

The same is true with our spiritual lives. When was the last time you really read your Bible? How often do you pray? How consistent has your worship been? Do you practice the spiritual disciplines? Do you regularly repent of your sin? Have you ever shared your faith? Have you forgiven others and reconciled with them? The blessed life is available to all who want it, but it will never be enjoyed by those who fail to prioritize the God of all blessings. It's not an accident that these verbs are not

unique in the Sermon on the Mount. We've come across them before. If you want God's best, keep pursuing him.

Secondly, consider **The Promise** (vv. 8-11). Jesus doesn't just drop this verb-dominated proverb and then move on. He assures us that God honors such pursuit. Notice that Jesus essentially says the same thing in verse 8 as he did in verse 7. The difference is that the emphasis is moved from the verbs (ask, seek, knock) to the direct objects (receives, finds, answers). The one who asks *will* receive. The one who seeks *will* find. The one who knocks *will* open.

This is illustrated in verses 9-10. The description of God as Father is prevalent in the Sermon on the Mount. This illustration is no different. No father would give his hungry child a stone or a serpent. Without a doubt, every father would move heaven and earth to feed their children real food like bread and fish. Not only is the role of the father an important detail, but so is the role of the son. He *asks* his father for bread. He *ask*s his father for fish.

This leads to the application of assurance. Even though human fathers are "evil," morally speaking, they naturally know they must provide for their children and feed them when they asks, how much more so will our Heavenly Father honor our requests? This is, again, a greater/lesser argument. If mere humans can grasp this basic premise, how much more so can we trust God to fulfill it?

We error when we seek the blessed life in others, through others, or with others apart from the Lord. If you think people are the secret to the good life, you are going to be disappointed. Therefore, keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking, the things of God. It will be worth it.

Jesus concludes by considering **The Passion** (vv. 12). If the command to ask, seek, and knock fits the broader argument Jesus has been establishing, it also fits the immediate context. In verses 1-6, Jesus explored hypocritical criticism. The critic is one that is aware of the flaws of others while simultaneously blind to their own. They are well-aware of their brother's speck while ignorant of their own tree trunk.

Critics live miserable lives. Have you not noticed how rare legalists smile? They are busy trying to whip everyone into shape. The same can be said to the culturally empowered who are equally religious and equally legalistic. The citizen of God's king lives by a different creed.

The Golden Rule, given in verse 12, is not unique to Jesus. Writers like Rabbi Hillel, Confucius, and Stoics all gave their versions of the Golden Rule. Most of these examples come from a negative perspective. Don't do something to someone because they'll turn around and do it to you. This was the basic foreign policy of both the USA and USSR during the Cold War. Neither wanted to launch nukes first in the fear that the other side would do the same.

Jesus, however, suggests the opposite. *Do* to others what you want them to do to you ... even if they do not reciprocate. This is Kingdom living. This is gospel love. This is the secret to the blessed life. The critic wants to be perceived as better, wise, and holier seeking validation through their superiority. The Blessed already have the validation of God himself because he is the sort of loving father who gives to his children who asks, seeks, and knocks. Therefore, the blessed children of God love with abandonment. When we ask, we receive. When we seek, we find. When we knock, we open. And then, we give, we go, we bless.