

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Start Loving

Scripture: Matthew 7:7-12

Code: 2251

Matthew, chapter 7, verses 7 to 12, let me read them for you as the setting for our discussion this morning. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? Therefore all things whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

Verse 12 is the key verse, and the first part of verse 12 is the key word to us. "All things whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The rest of the passage comments and relates to that great truth. Some have called this the Mount Everest of ethics. Unquestionably, it is the supreme standard for all human relationships. We know it from childhood as expressed in terms of the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Edersheim, the great Hebrew Christian scholar, said of this statement, "It is the nearest approach to absolute love of which human nature is capable." And Bishop Ryle wrote, "This truth settles a hundred different points. It prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases."

I believe there are a lot of ethical things the world can do, and every once in a while and now and then they might even hit on this one. But the fullness of all that this ethic really means is only possible to a believer, not to an unbeliever. Because there is no capacity within the life of an unbeliever to function in this manner.

Now, as we've been studying the Book of Matthew, we have been learning that the Christian perspective is that we are a kingdom and God is our king. We live in a monarchy. God is a reigning, ruling, sovereign king, and we are the subjects of His kingdom. But that is not the only metaphor. Matthew points out the fact, and so does our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, that we are also a family. The kingdom concept deals with rule, and the family concept deals with relationship.

And as we come to this particular section of the Sermon on the Mount we are dealing with relationship. We are dealing with relationships to people. That is the subject of chapter 7, verses 1 to

12. As John Scott has well said, "Christian counterculture is not an individual value system and lifestyle. It is a community affair. It involves relationships."

We are a family. In fact, in Ephesians, it tells us that we are the household of God. Repeatedly does John say, "We are children of God." Matthew has already informed us very clearly by the words of Jesus that God is our Father, who art in heaven.

And so we see, then, not only the kingdom concept in Matthew, but, within the rule and the reign and the kingdom, there is a relationship of a father to his children, and that has some very important ramifications. In fact, I am convinced that the two greatest, strongest elements of Christian truth are within the framework of that relationship. I believe the two greatest realities in Christian truth are these: God is our Father, and Christians are our brothers. That, to me, is the essential truth of Christianity.

Now, Jesus said that, for in Matthew, chapter 22, He said this: "The first and great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second is like unto it, to love your," what? "Neighbor as yourself." Jesus said you can sum up all Biblical revelation, you can sum up all divine data, and you can boil it down to the reality of two things: relationship with the Father and relationship with brothers and sisters. We're a family. God is our Father. Christians are our brothers and sisters.

Now, we've already gone into the fact of God is our Father when we discussed chapter 6, verses 9 and following, "Our Father, who art in heaven." We've already seen how Jesus delineated the Fatherhood of God, and gave to it new dimensions of comprehension and understanding, and how it was always His favorite term for the Lord God. He spoke of Him as His Father.

And now we're coming to the second element of that great summation of all of the law, the love of one another. And that is the second great element. And I would hasten to add that you can't have the second unless you have the first. Unless rightly related to God, it is impossible to fulfill this ethical standard in verse 12. Utterly impossible.

Now, this is consistent with the Old Testament. The summation of the law of God in the Old Testament is clear. In Deuteronomy 6, you have the first part, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." In Leviticus 19:18, you have the second part, "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." That's what that verse says. So, repeatedly, Old Testament and New Testament, God's law is for a right relationship to Him as a Father and a right relationship to others as brothers in the faith. Those are the salient features of Christian truth.

And, having already looked at the first concept when we studied chapter 6, we've now come to the second one. And the Lord is instructing us here as to how we are to love our neighbor, how we are to

love each other. You will note also at the end of verse 12, "for this is the law and the prophets." In other words, the whole law as it relates to mankind living in this world can be summed up by, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Or, another way to say it, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." That's just another way to say the same thing. We are to love one another. Since God is our loving, caring Father, when that vertical relationship is right, the horizontal follows in its wake.

Now, let me add another note about the text. This particular section, verses 1 to 12, is the climax of the main theme of the whole sermon. And the main theme of the whole sermon is to present the standards for living in the kingdom. He started out with the standards related to self, the standard related to the world, related to the Word, related to morality, related to religion, related to money and possessions. And now we come to the standard related to human relationships.

Jesus gives us a manifesto of living in His kingdom that is totally comprehensive. It deals with animate and inanimate objects. It deals with people in the family, such as here, and people outside the family, such as earlier, in the salt and light passage. It deals with how we treat other people and perceive them, not criticizing, judging and condemning. And it deals with how we treat us, self-examining, humility.

All areas, how we treat God as a person, as a loving Father, and how we treat His Word as a revelation of His heart, all elements of the dimensions of Christian living within the kingdom are discussed in this masterpiece of a sermon. And all of them boil down to tremendous statements which are encompassing all the truth embodied in those areas, and reducing them down to these marvelous truths.

Now, as we come to verses 1 to 12, we could take all Biblical data relative to human relationships and boil it back to these 12 verses, in summary fashion. This is the marvel of the mind of Christ. He alone could so simplify the vast area of human relationships. And keep this in mind, that always the Lord is contrasting His standard with the standard of the day, which was basically the standard of the scribes and the Pharisees, and they were wrong on every one of them.

They were wrong about self. They were wrong about the world. They were wrong about the law of God. They were wrong about morality. They were wrong about religion. They were wrong about money. They were wrong about possession. And they were definitely wrong about human relationships. They were self-righteous, egotistical, proud, bigots, who set themselves up in some elevated position and looked down their noses at everybody else. They were damning and condemning and censorious to everybody around them. They had violated the basic standard of human relationships, which the Lord reiterates right here.

And the whole point, people, you need to see, is all the way through this, He is making the effort to drive them to the desperation of saying, "We are unqualified to be in God's kingdom." And when they

come to that point, then they begin to respond in a right way. In other words, you have to hear the bad news before you hear the good news.

And it is after this passage, in verse 13, that He gives them the invitation. He says, "Now, I've shown you where you are. You can keep going down the broad way that leads to destruction, if you want. Or, you can enter in at the narrow gate." And that is the invitation that follows the main theme of the message.

So we come, then, to this area of human relationships. Now, I would just remind you that the whole concept of verses 1 to 12 can be boiled back to one statement: "Love your neighbor as yourself. That is the law and the prophets." That's the sum of it all. Now, loving somebody has two sides, a negative and a positive. Loving somebody means you don't do some things to them and you do do other things to them. Right? It has a both side concept. That's why verses 1 to 6 is the negative and verses 7 to 12 is the positive.

Now, you're going to have to think with me through this this morning. But it's going to be a very vital area. This is the sum of all of our ethics. You need to understand this. Okay, I can't be very entertaining about it, because I've got to get the point over. You're going to have to stay plugged in. But the concept is this: If you are to love your neighbor as yourself, if you are to love the way God wants you to love, if love is to rule our lives and love is to guide all of our human interaction, then we must realize that love does not criticize, judge, condemn and damn people who don't quite come up to our standard. That's verses 1 to 6, right? From last week.

But love is just more than not doing something. You can't -- if somebody comes to you and says, "Do you love me?" And you say to them, "Well, I never did anything bad to you, did I?" Well, that doesn't mean you love them. I mean, the absence of something doesn't consummate love. Love is not only not doing some things, it is doing some other things and that's why we have the balance in verses 7 through 12. And we're going to look at that this morning.

Let's look at the principle, first, in verse 12. We're going to go quick. Verse 12, "Therefore," and we'll see what the therefore's there for in a little while, "Therefore, all things," not some, not a few, not many, not most, not almost, "all things whatever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The basic positive affirmation that governs all human relationships is, as you have heard it since you were a child, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

And the key is that we are to do as we would have them do. It doesn't necessarily mean they did, or they will. In fact, we may know they won't. But that doesn't change what we should do. Love doesn't judge, and love doesn't criticize. And love also reaches out and does to others what it would wish to be done to itself, even though it may know that it never will be done.

Now, this truth is really limited to the Bible. This rule was established by Jesus. I mean, human religions and human philosophies and human attitudes have come up with a negative concept along this line, but they never were able to turn the corner to the positive.

Let me show you what I mean. If you study philosophy and various and sundry teachers and teachings, you will note that there is a negative kind of Golden Rule that appears in almost all systems of ethics. For example, among the rabbinical traditions, the famous Hebrew rabbi Hillel had this negative principle. He said, "What is hateful to yourself, do not to someone else." In other words, don't do something to somebody that you wouldn't want done to you. But it's a "don't" principle. It's a withholding or a refraining from doing it.

In the Book of Tobit, it says, "What thou thyself hatest, to no man do." The Septuagint scholars of Alexandria, who put together the Greek Old Testament, in a letter to Aristeas, said this, "As you wish that no evil befall you, but to be a partaker of all good things, so you should act on the same principle toward your subjects and offenders." In other words, you don't want any evil on you, so don't do any evil to anybody else. Again, it's a "don't do" principle. It's negative.

Now, you can go to the Orient and you'll find, for example, Confucius taught, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do." Every one so far is a "don't do" thing. It's a withholding, or a refraining.

Among the Greeks, there was a particular king by the name of Nikoklis. He said this. "Do not do to others the things which make you angry when you experience them at the hands of other people." Again, it's a "don't do." Epictetus said, "What you avoid suffering yourself, don't inflict on others." The Stoics said, "What you do not want to be done to you, do not do to anyone else."

Now, the whole world knows how to do not do. They just don't know how to do. See? I mean, we can all withhold what is evil. So in a negative form, it's a very common principle. And you can find it in all kinds of systems of theology and religion and ethics. But left alone as a negative, it's really a weak principle. Why? Because it is basically, mark this, a revelation of the selfishness of man.

Now, if you want to know how to define man at his basic root, you can do it in one word: selfish. That's it. Selfish. Man is utterly, totally, hopelessly dominated by self. Totally. And because of that, he can come up with a principle like this. Don't do this to somebody, because if you do, what'll happen? They might do it to you.

You know, you get mad at a guy and you say to yourself, "I'd like to deck that guy." You are not restrained out of love, in most cases. You are restrained because you have a nose, too, that you'd like to hang on to. I've always said I'd pick a fight with anybody smaller than me who's had a recent

illness.

We all have that kind of a tendency to be self-seeking, and so this becomes sort of a utilitarian, humanistic, self-serving negative principle. We don't do certain things out of fear. It's egoism. It's the protection of self and the fear of retaliation. Selfishness. It's self-preservation. It knows nothing of selfless love. Selfless love is able to do, and to do, and to do what it wishes were done to it, even though it knows it never will be that way.

People say, "Honesty is the best policy." And they say that because they don't want to get caught in a lie, not because they really believe that. It's self-seeking. In its negative form, frankly, it isn't even Christian. It's just common-sense protection. It's like, "Don't play with fire." Why? You'll get burned. Protect self. It's refraining from doing, refraining from saying. You don't need any faith in God for that. You don't need any salvation for that. You can do that on your own.

But the positive aspect is utterly impossible. To assume in your own heart what you would want the very most and do that for somebody else is beyond the purview of an unregenerate man. It just isn't going to happen. Why? Because, apart from God, the Bible says men are, II Timothy 3:2, "despisers of those that are good, and lovers of themselves." Now, you put humanity under those definitions, and you've got a real problem. They love themselves and they hate people who do good. Now tell me that that kind of a person is going to go around doing good to others. No.

Now, every once in a while, you know, somebody may stumble on a good deed and do something, like the blind pig that finds the slop now and then. It may happen inadvertently. But it'll never be a pattern of life. It'll never be a conscious, purely motivated, free giving pattern of life. Like Titus is told in chapter 3, verse 3 by the apostle Paul, "Men are hateful, hating one another." Why? Because they're selfish. And it's "protect myself" that drives them. So watch.

The negative ethic is compelled by fear. The positive ethic is compelled by love. And fear is common to man because he's dominated by self-preservation. Love comes only from God.

I drive my car carefully most of the time. And I drive the speed limit. Not always because of love for the law. Usually out of fear that if I break it I'll get caught. And I drive down the street, and I avoid crashing into people. Why? Because I don't want to just hurt people, and I don't want to get sued for crashing into somebody. And so, in a very real sense, you drive out of fear, particularly in this city.

And so you avoid doing certain things. You make sure you stop when you should and go the speed that you should. And you don't drive indiscriminately, because you might run over somebody and it would be a terrible disaster, and you'd get all kinds of abuse and have a guilty conscience, and you seek to preserve yourself.

And so you operate your car out of fear. That's quite different than giving a ride in your car to someone who has a need to get somewhere. Do you see the difference? That's love. And that's something completely different than fear.

And the world in its ethics can restrain itself from doing certain things because of fear, but will not find the power to do other things of a goodness nature because it doesn't have the love of God shed abroad in its heart. That demands the knowledge of Christ.

So if you look carefully at the principle, then, it is a principle that is monumental in its meaning and reality. And men are unable, because men are lovers of their own selves. But we as Christians certainly should not be characterized by that. We ought to be able to go beyond that. I mean, we ought to get off the dime on self-preservation and start throwing ourselves away for the behalf of others.

In Philippians, chapter 2, verse 20, Paul says, "I'm going to send Timothy to the Philippians." Now, listen. Why? "Because I have no man likeminded," listen, "who will naturally care for your state, for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Paul says, "I'm going to send Timothy to you because there's nobody who in their natural man can care about you. They all seek their own." That is basic to human nature, and only Christ can change that. Only Christ can change it.

So the dynamic for fulfilling this ethic has to come from outside our fallen nature. It has to come when the indwelling Spirit is planted within us, and the fruit of the Spirit is, what's the first one? Love. Man utterly, selfishly, hopelessly trapped in his sin, cannot express this marvelous ethic. But we as Christians better.

If the life of God pulses in the soul of a man or a woman, if the love of God abides in us, is shed abroad in our hearts, Romans 5:5, if the fruit of the Spirit is love, if it's there, and the command is there to "love one another as I have loved you," and that's repeated from one end of the Scripture to the other as a reality that should be existing in our lives, then we had better respond to that.

And what it simply means, beloved, is this, that you determine in your own heart what you would want for you and do it for someone else. You say, "Well, I have some needs. I need this and I need that." If you know somebody else that needs them, too, then do it for them, not you. Do unto them what you would normally do for you. That is utterly foreign to an unregenerate mind. They don't know the meaning of self-sacrifice in that manner. That just doesn't happen, because man is utterly self-seeking.

It may appear on the surface to be self-sacrificing, but ultimately, down deep, there's a self-seeking goal, even in martyrdom for a cause. The goal may be to gain the affection of your peers, to gain a

reputation, to make a name for yourself in society, to have a martyr's complex, to go down in history, to whatever, whatever.

But just that free total selfless sacrificial giving for the sake of someone else what you would want for yourself is unknown in the world. Everyone seeks his own. And that's why Romans 3 says, "There is none that doeth good, no, not," what? "One." And that was put there because somebody would've said, "comma, except me." So the Lord said, "No, not you. Not one."

Now, having established the principle, Jesus gives three reasons to obey it, three reasons to keep it. Number one, the purpose of God demands it. And I'm going to go real quick on these. The purpose of God demands it. Look at the end of verse 12. "For this is the law and the prophets." I mean, this is the whole point of all the Scripture. This is the sum of the Old Testament.

For example, when you read in the Decalogue, in Exodus, chapter 20, starting in verse 12, that thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not covet, all of those things are simply a summation of, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." You don't want them to kill you, steal from you, covet from you, commit adultery against you, etc. You see?

All the Ten Commandments is an expansion of two principles. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. Therefore, you will not have any other gods before Him. You will not take His name in vain. And you will not desecrate the Sabbath Day. Because you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Second is love your neighbor as yourself. Therefore, you will not kill, you will not covet, you will not lie, you will not steal. You see? Commit adultery. All that does is expand that. And then the rest of the Bible comments on those things and expands those things.

But it all goes back to those some basics, so that all the law and the prophets hangs on loving one another so much that when I know you have a need, I will do for you what I would want done to myself. And, in fact, if it comes to that and I have to choose, I'll choose to do it for you and sacrifice my own self. If I know I need a new suit and I know you need a new suit, then I'll get you a new suit, because I know that's what I would do for me. And I'll go without. That's the essence of the principle.

And James 2:8 calls it the royal law. If you're looking for the law of the king, the law that rules in the kingdom and the relationships of the kingdom, it says, "The royal law is this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The same thing you would do for you, do for them. That's the same principle, identical. And that's what He's calling for here.

Look with me for a moment at Romans, chapter 13, verse 8. It says, "Owe no man anything but to love one another. For he that," listen, "loveth another hath fulfilled the law." You see, when you love your neighbor as yourself, you have fulfilled all the law, because you're not going to kill him, you're not going to steal from him, you're not going to cheat him, and so forth.

In fact, Paul goes on to say, "The law says thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Thou shalt not covet. And if there be any other commandment, it's briefly comprehended in the saying, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' That's the sum of it. Just put it all together in that saying. Love, then, works no ill to his neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Romans 13:10.

People say, "Oh, the Bible is so complex. So many verses. How can we ever contain it?" How about this? "Love your neighbor as yourself." Period, paragraph. That governs all human relations.

And, by the way, beloved, it has two parts. If you love your neighbor as yourself, there are some things you don't do. Right? You don't condemn, criticize. That's the negative, verses 1 to 6. And you do what you would wish done to you. That's the positive side.

You see, it's the purpose of God that demands it. This is the whole reason for the whole revelation. This whole thing is wasted unless we are obedient to that. So the purpose of God would lead us to the word "obedient." Why should we live like this? Out of obedience. Out of obedience. To obey is better than sacrifice.

Second reason. The second reason we are to keep this ethic is because the promise of God demands it -- not only the purpose of God, but the promise of God. The promise of God. And you'll notice the "therefore" in verse 12, so let's back up to verses 7 to 11, which lead us into the principle. The illustration comes first in this case, in order that it might be a bridge from the first six verses.

And let's look at this for a minute. It says in verses 7 and 8 that whatever we ask and seek and knock for, we're going to receive. Now, listen. We can feel free -- here's the heart of the matter -- we can feel free to give to others and to do for others and to sacrifice for others and to love others because we can be confident that, in giving up all we have to someone else, we have an ultimate and eternal resource to replenish our own needs. You see?

I mean, the promise of God to me that what I ask for and seek for and knock for will be given to me frees me up to bestow anything and everything I have on the one that has the need. Do you see? I can do unto others what I would do for myself without fear of having nothing left, because all I have to do is turn to my loving Father, who gives me bread for every day and takes care of me in every way, and I shall never do without that which I need. Now, is that a far cry from the way we live? You'd better believe it. We are so selfish and possessive.

But let's go and look at this passage specifically. People have been confused about the order of this chapter, and they think a lot of these things are just kind of little tidbits thrown in and they don't have any connection. I don't believe that. I think there is a masterful presentation. I think the Lord eases from 6 into 7 and from 7 into 9 and 10 and then into 11 and then into 12 in a beautiful, majestic way of flowing this whole thing together.

Let me show you why I say that. People say, "Well, why doesn't He give the principle of verse 12 and then the illustration?" Because the illustration fits also with the first 6 verses. It's in a perfect place. Let me show you why.

The main principle, the negative principle of human relations in verses 1 through 5a is, don't what? Judge. Don't criticize. Don't be a gossiping, backbiting critic. Now, the danger of that is that in not wanting to criticize, we may become gullible and vulnerable, right? Does that mean we're not supposed to reprove and rebuke a brother in sin? No. Does it mean we're not supposed to discriminate and discern false prophets, false teachers and apostates? No.

You'll notice in verse 5, it says, even though we're not to judge, we are to see clearly to cast a splinter out of our brother's eye. We have to go to fellow believers and see the sin in their life and confront it and do all we can to see them restored. And we have to be careful we don't throw holy things to dogs and we don't throw pearls to swine.

Now you say, "Well, if we don't judge and we don't criticize, how are we going to know who the hogs and dogs are? And how are we also going to know about the sin in our brother's eye? We've got to be discriminating." And I'm telling you, must been a half a dozen people last Sunday that hit me and said, "Well, you know, I don't think I'm judgmental. I don't think I've got a 2x4 in my own eye. I think I got that out of there. But how can I discern the sin in a believer's heart? Or how do I know a hog and a dog when I meet one? How do I know an apostate? How do I know them?"

And, you know, we all want a formula, don't we? We want a checklist. You know what the answer is? "Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you." Listen, who is able to discriminate? Who is able to judge? Who is able to discern?

Who is able to know when you've got somebody that you don't want to throw your pearls to? Who is able to discern when you have someone there that you don't want to give a holy thing to because you know they'll tramp it under their feet? Who is it that's able to see sin in a believer's life and lovingly go and restore that believer?

I'll tell you who it is. It's God and God alone who has that kind of discernment. And so if you want to have it, there's no little formula that you're going to use. There's no hip pocket rulebook. The only

place you're going to have to go for that information is down on your knees. You see? I don't know the answer to that. But I know that James 1 says, "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and holds back nothing."

Listen. God -- if all God wanted was for us to go through with a bunch of little formulas and a bunch of little ditties and a bunch of little rules, He'd have passed us a hip pocket kind of a rule book and said, "You're on your own." But that isn't what He wants. What He wants is a relationship. And so He gives us enough truth so that we're responsible, and enough mystery so that we're dependent. See?

And ever and always in dealing with spiritual issues, we are thrown to the Word of God for the principle, and we sort of go along for a while with that principle, and we run out of gas, and we have to throw ourselves on His wisdom, don't we? And that's what keeps the relationship hot, see? If we had all the answers in the hip pocket, the relationship would suffer. There's more to it than that.

And so we have to ask and seek and knock, and He reveals to us. And I believe that's the bridge that the Spirit of God would have us see there. It helps us know how to get that splinter out of a brother's eye and how to be careful about giving holy things to dogs and casting pearls before swine.

And so that's how this text reaches back. But let's see how it reaches forward to our text. Listen. How can we be free to give to others? And I've already told you how it reaches forward -- by knowing that God will give back to us what we need. People say, "Well, you know, I'd love to invest in so-and-so's life. You know, I know they have real needs. But, oh, my, what's going to happen in my life?" And the Lord says, "Ask and I'll give it."

Now, some people think verse 7 is a blank check. I'm making an offer to God. I'm saying, "Here's my blank check, Lord. It's all signed and delivered. Now unload on the bank of heaven there, and get it on down to me." And we get anything. I hear people say, "Well, the Bible says, 'Ask,' verse 8, 'for everyone that asks receives and everyone that seeks finds and to him that knocks it shall be opened.'" And they just block that little verse out, "All you've got to do is ask." Now, wait a minute. There are some other conditions, folks. Just a few others.

Number one, this is only good if you're a child of God. Otherwise, you have no relationship to Him, right? He's not bound. First of all, you must be a child of God. Now, watch this one. Secondly, you must be living in obedience, or, as Peter says, "Your prayers will be hindered." I John 3:22, "Whatever we ask, we receive of Him," listen to this, "because we keep His commandments and are doing the things that are pleasing in His sight." When you're not doing those, and you're not obeying, you're not receiving either.

There are conditions: number one, to be a child of God; number two, to be an obedient child of God. Number three, to have a totally selfless motive in asking. If you ask to receive for yourself, forget it. What do you mean? James 4:3, "You ask and you receive not, because you ask amiss, to consume it upon your own lusts." All you want is to fulfill your own desire.

So, asking -- you have to be a child of God to receive, and an obedient child of God, and a selfless child of God. And, finally, you have to submit it all to His will. I John 5:14 and 15, "In whatever we ask, we know we receive of Him if we ask according to His will." That's not a blank check. It's just that when the conditions are right -- you're His child, you're His obedient child, you're His unselfish child, and you ask according to His will, in order that He may be glorified -- He'll do it.

There's one other element I would just point out to you here, and that is that these are three present imperatives. Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. They talk about a perseverance and a constancy. And they also have another little thought in them.

Ask is very simple. A child does that. There's no involvement in it. There's no participation in it. You just ask. Seek is stronger than an asking. There's a participation in it. At least you're moving your eyes. Knock, you're banging away. There's a greater participation. So that even though we know everything comes from the Lord, that does not assume that we are not actively, aggressively, perseveringly involved in its fulfillment.

I mean, I don't just sit at my office and say, "Lord, I want to preach a great sermon Sunday. Please, I ask you, give me a great sermon." No, what I do is I ask the Lord all week for that, and then I seek that by going through the Word of God and reading and reading. And then I begin banging on the Lord, in a sense, by saying, "Lord, I'm struggling with this thing and I want to understand it," and this one this morning, which isn't so hot, anyway, I rewrote three times. And on and on you go, struggling with it. But the point is, I realize that God is the only one who can produce through me, but at the same time, I've got to be involved in that.

So there is a sense in which we are really involved, even in our own prayers. Why? Why does God want us to persevere? Beloved, it's so simple. Not because we have to bang away to get God to act, but because the more we're involved in the process, the greater the relationship becomes. You see? The deeper, the richer, the more meaningful my communion with Him. Because God doesn't want me to carry a hip pocket formula book. He wants me to have a vital relationship with Him. And He does the kind of things that throw me into that relationship in a wholesale fashion.

And why am I willing to do that? Why am I willing to live that principle out and to do unto others what I wish they would do to me? Because I know that whatever I may give away of myself and whatever good things I may do to others, I know God will replenish my own supply. And so I do it not only because of the purpose of God to be obedient to the law and the prophets, but I do it because it is

basically to fulfill the promise of God that He will meet my needs. And so I not only do it out of obedience, but, second word, I do it out of gratitude. Gratitude.

And, finally, there's a third reason. Not only does the purpose of God and the promise of God demand that I live according to verse 12, but so does the pattern of God. The pattern of God. You know something? Ephesians 5:1 puts it this way. "As dear children, we are to walk as God walked, or walks." Tremendous statement. Walk as God walks. Conduct your life the way God does.

If I go around the world saying I'm a child of God, then there ought to be something of me that manifests something of Him, right? People say our kids look like us. Tough, but true. Not only do they look like us, they are like us. And if I claim to be a child of God, there ought to be some resemblance, shouldn't there be?

And He makes a marvelous illustration, verse 9, "What man is there of you whom, if his son asks bread, will he give him a stone?" Do you know a loving father that would do that? Bread, they used a little kind of a pale flour, just a little round thing. It looked like the same exact as those little limestones that you find on the shoreline of Israel. And a father could deceive his child. Father, I need just the basics of life -- bread. Would a loving father give him a little rock? He'd break his tooth. The answer is, "Of course not." I mean, the text, the Greek, even implies that. Of course, he won't.

Well, what about this? If he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent or an eel? A fish was a clean animal, according to ceremonial law. And a fish could be eaten. God said that was all right. But an eel and a snake were unclean animals. They could not be eaten. Leviticus 11:12 says that. I mean, would a father purposely make his son violate the law of God? No. He's not going to give him an unclean animal. Some people think that that means a snake that would bite him. No, the assumption is that it's cooked. Cooked snakes don't bite. The idea is the uncleanness of it.

A father will not purposely deceive his son. He will not purposely defile his son. And, finally, he won't purposely destroy his son, either. And Luke adds the fact that if his son asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? Scorpions in that part of the world are large, and when they tuck their legs and their claws underneath and sleep, they look exactly like an egg from the top. If the son asks his father for an egg, is his father going to give that which not only deceives him and defiles him, but destroys him? No father would do that.

Well, verse 11 says, "If ye, then, being evil," and, beloved, there is one of the greatest statements made from the beginning to the end of the Bible on the fallen nature of man -- even when he does good things to his children, he does not override the basic evil nature -- "If ye, then, being evil," and you are evil when you even give a good gift to your child, like bread and fish and an egg, just basic substance, but if you, with an evil, vile, fallen, corrupt and sinful nature, do that much out of a sense of parental love, "then how much more" -- there's that how much more argument that He used in

chapter 6 -- "how much more shall your Father" -- instead of saying "who is good," He says, "who is in heaven," which implies His holiness, "give good things to them that ask Him." And Luke adds, "give the Holy Spirit, the best of all things, to them that ask him."

And the point is this. If evil, unregenerate, sinful fathers give their kids the basics of life, don't you think God'll do that? And the idea that I see here is that God is the absolute giving Father, who gives to all what they need, knowing full well they could never give back to Him anything, in kind or measure. And if that's the way He is, then isn't that the way we, His children, should be toward others? See?

His purpose demands it. It's the whole reason for the law. His promise frees us up to do it, because He will replenish everything that we do for others. And here we find the majesty of this thought, His pattern is this way to us. How can we say we are His children and do less for others? "Therefore," verse 12 says, "therefore, all things, whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

God isn't like other deities. The Greeks had their stories about their gods who answered men's prayers. Let me tell you one. Aurora was the goddess of the dawn. She fell in love with Tithonus. Tithonus was a mortal youth. Zeus, who was the king of the gods, offered her any gift that she might choose for her mortal lover. She asked Zeus for a gift to give this mortal lover. Very naturally, she chose that Tithonus should live forever. In other words, she wanted immortality for him so they could stay together forever. But she had forgotten to ask that Tithonus might remain forever young. And so, according to the mythology, Tithonus grew old forever, without ever being able to die. The Greeks saw gods that played tricks and brought curses. Our God is not so. Not so.

We ask, He gives, and He gives what is best, and never deceives and never defiles and never destroys. He is our pattern. And with that pattern we are to give to others out of love.

But the problem is this. Basically, we are evil. And even when we become Christians, we still have sin in us, don't we? And the fight for selfishness dominates our lives. So we need to be broken in our hearts, that we might be unselfish toward others.

Let's bow in prayer.

We thank you, Father, for the promise of Philippians 1:6, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. We thank you that you began the work of planting the love in us. We pray that you will continue that work. We know our part is to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto you, as an act of spiritual service. The only beauty we have is the beauty of Christ in us. The only capacity we have to live this positive ethic of love is the love of God poured through us. May we who are the children of God manifest the love of the one who is our

Father.

We are commanded, as it were, in the very terms of the apostle John, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God. So, beloved, if God loved us, we ought also to love one another." Help us to know those words and live them, Father, so that our relationships are right, not criticizing, not judging, not condemning. That's the negative. But the positive, too, loving others as we love ourselves, doing to them what we would wish done to us.

Lord, we know that there are some here this morning who are frustrated because of these things, for in their life there is no capacity to fulfill them, because you're not there. We pray that this might be that day when they open their life, give entrance to the Son of God.

And those of us that are Christians, Lord, find so very often that we fight against these things in our self-centeredness. We pray that it might be a day when we bring our will to the submission of the Spirit.

So speak to us throughout this day of these things, that we may not be the same, and may live yet more to your glory, in Christ's name. Amen.

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