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**Ask, Seek, Knock**  
**Matthew 7:7-12**  
June 22nd, 2014, Jeff Germs

Last week we took a look at Jesus' teaching on judging from Matthew 7 and I didn't quite have time to finish up, so I want to close the lid on that section today by dealing quickly with verse 6.

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If you remember from last week, we saw that Jesus' main message was that **before we judge someone else's actions we need to take a good, honest and sober look at our own hearts, and we especially have no right to judge someone's motivation or intentions. Only God has that kind of inside information.** Jesus said that when we attempt to do that it's like asking someone if we can take a speck out of their eye when we have a huge log sticking out of ours.

We also noted that the purpose of right judging is actually to help the other person, not condemn them. Like Paul said in Galatians 6:1, if we see a brother or sister caught in sin we are to help them back on the right path. Verse 6 ties it all up to make a nice package.

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**Matthew 7:6 (NLT)**

**<sup>6</sup> "Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you."**

Now, people have interpreted this saying of Jesus in many ways. And I don't really like how the NLT translates this verse because it's easy to misinterpret it. It looks like what Jesus is saying is, "Don't give the valuable Gospel, or message of the Kingdom to unworthy people." Does that sound like something Jesus would say? I don't think so. The truth is that we are all unworthy. It's not our job to judge the worth of people.

Jesus literally said, "**Do not give to dogs what is holy...**"

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I think what Jesus actually meant by this is "***Don't give something valuable to people who are not ready to receive it. It does them no good. As a matter of fact, it can actually do them harm.***"

I have been guilty of this in the past. In my youthful eagerness I would try to share the Gospel with, for example, someone I just met in a coffee shop, before they were ready, and it would only serve to push them away further. I used to be so proud of myself for boldly sharing Christ with someone, and arrogantly pushing my truth on them. But, the only thing it did was make them want to avoid me at all costs. It's like trying to feed a newborn baby a nice big juicy steak. It only serves to choke them. So, Jesus says, don't give them what is valuable before the soil of their hearts is tilled and ready to receive. If someone is not ready to accept the truth, sharing it with them is not just a waste of time, but dangerous for them and for you. There is a good chance that they will turn on you and you will lose them in the process.

What we think, when we judge others in an arrogant and self-righteous way, is that **we** have the answers. We are right and the other person is wrong. In other words, we have **the pearl** and we are going to tell those unholy people what's what. It postures ourselves above the other person as their judge. We try to play the part of God. That, Jesus says, is not our job. It's God's.

Let's continue on to the next section in Matthew 7.

**Matthew 7:7-12 (NLT)**

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**<sup>7</sup> "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>9</sup> "You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead?"**

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**<sup>10</sup> Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! <sup>11</sup> So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. <sup>12</sup> "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.**

Now, normally we read this section on prayer as if it's isolated from the previous part on judging, but it is very much linked. What Jesus is saying here is, "don't do things the natural way", which is to exalt ourselves above others. The reason we judge others is because we think we know better than they do. We put ourselves above them. We think that our sin is not as bad as theirs. We think that if we can find someone who is worse than us we will be judged less harshly.

“Sure, I may be a thief, but my neighbour is a murderer.” “I may be an angry, bitter person, but at least I’m not like so and so.” We can always find someone worse than we are, thereby making our sin seem somehow less despicable. In God’s economy though, it doesn’t work like that. All sin grieves God. Sin is sin. It all breaks relationship with a holy God. In Romans 1, Paul writes about how angry God is at all sin no matter what it is. And it’s interesting because he lumps sins like greed, gossip, quarrelling, hate, and envy in with murder. We like to grade on a curve. God doesn’t do that.

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In God’s economy, we are all in the same boat. God knows that if we were to let our anger go unrestrained it would lead to murder. If we let our lust go unbridled it would lead to adultery. We are all sinners, depraved and each of us comes to God with empty hands. And when we judge others in the wrong way, what we are doing is trying to do is get something from them that is not ours to have. We, in fact, are trying to do God’s job. That is idolatry.

And so in this section on Prayer, Jesus is saying, “Don’t try to get from people what only God can give. You are basically trying to redeem yourself by comparing yourself and trying to find someone who you think is more depraved than you. Don’t do that.

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Instead, go to God with a spirit of contrition. Not like the guy in this story Jesus told in Luke 18.

#### Luke 18:9–14 (NLT)

<sup>9</sup> *Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else:*

<sup>10</sup> *“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’*

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<sup>13</sup> *“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

The posture of our heart should be one of utmost humility, not like this self-righteous religious person Jesus talked about who was praying beside a “sinful” person and saying, with nose in the air, “Thank you God that I’m not like this sinner beside me.” Instead, we should be like the one who knows he doesn’t measure up and pray, “Have mercy on me a sinner. I am undeserving of your grace.”

And so instead of thinking we are the judge over others and need to take matters into our own hands, we should take it to our Father, God in prayer. So this passage is about our prayer relationship with God, the Father. There are some things that we can learn from this passage about what this relationship should look like.

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Firstly, **prayer is a very active kind of relationship.** There is nothing passive about the kind of prayer relationship that God wants to have with his people. It’s active on his part, of course. He is always the initiator in our relationship and we are always the responders.

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He is always actively working towards His final goal of redeeming a people for Himself. He continually moves towards us. But, prayer is also very active on our part.

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**Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.** There is nothing passive about this. I think we have a tendency in the evangelical church to view God’s sovereignty as a sort of Christian fatalism. Fatalism is the belief that you can’t prevent things from happening. The belief is that there is some sort of universal unseen, impersonal force that is causing things to fall into place and we have no part or responsibility in making things happen. We’ve all heard people say things like, “Fate brought us together.” Or “If it’s meant to be it will be.” We have no control over the events of our lives. We simply need to wait for it and accept whatever is. There are people who believe this without any belief in a god of any kind. That’s fatalism.

Now, I think many Christians have a sort of fatalistic idea of how God works, and they live in that paradigm. I have heard many Christians say things like, “If it’s meant to be it will happen” as if we are just pawns in God’s hands, and he gives us no part to play except to blindly accept what will be.

In Ancient Mesopotamia people believed in a plurality of gods. That was the world Abraham was called out of. Their belief was that the gods were not at all benevolent. As a matter of fact, people were their slaves who lived in a constant state of fear, continually trying to appease these angry gods in all kinds of ways even to the point of sacrificing their children. The gods held people captive. They were in complete control and like a malevolent chess master moving the people against their will to do whatever would keep them subjugated and in fear. That was the belief that they were held captive by.

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But, that is a passive sort of faith that I don't see that in the Bible. That sort of picture of God is a misunderstanding of God's sovereignty. Many people have the idea that if God is sovereign, he makes everything happen, which means we have no choice in the matter. We are uninvolved, except to be the pawn that he moves capriciously to suit his whims. This misses the point of the relationship that God bought for us at a great price.

I believe wholeheartedly in the sovereignty of God. He is all-powerful. Nothing escapes him. Nothing will happen without his allowing it. He is sovereign over everything, but he has chosen, because he desires a love relationship with his people, to give us the freedom to obey or not. We see this all the way through the Bible. You cannot escape the fact that these two truths are held in tension. God is sovereign, but he has also given us the will to choose. It's what J.I. Packer calls an antinomy — two beliefs that seem to be contradictory, but are in fact, both true.

I don't think God ever intended that we would be mindless slaves with no choice. Even before the fall in Genesis His way was to partner with His people for his greater good. We are not meant to have a slave/master relationship with God. We are his children.

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Romans 8:15–16 (NLT)

***<sup>15</sup> So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father."*** ***<sup>16</sup> For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.***

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Galatians 4:4–7 (NLT)

***<sup>4</sup> But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. <sup>5</sup> God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. <sup>6</sup> And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."*** ***<sup>7</sup> Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.***

God did not create us to be passive victims in his creation scheme. He created us to be sons and daughters actively involved in creation. We are to be all about working with him to create places of flourishing and life.

And part of that involvement has to do with actively communicating with him through prayer. Prayer is hard work. A while ago someone talked to me about a problem they were having and I encouraged them to trust God, and I then left them without praying about it with them. I felt convicted by the Spirit of Jesus to go back and actually pray with them.

So often we have this passive attitude in our relationship with God. We say, "Let's just wait and see what God does." And many times we do need to wait for God, but the waiting should not be passive. It should be very active. And even our listening to him should be active. We should purposefully pray for direction. We should purposefully pray that the hand of God would be moved, and then we should humbly move in a direction so that God can steer us. That is cooperating with God.

It's the same with our spiritual maturity as it is with our prayer life. Our tendency as evangelicals over the years has been to fill our heads with biblical knowledge. We have been very proud of being a people of the book. Our theology was sound, but then we would go through our lives without letting the Holy Spirit use that knowledge to change us, so we remained like little children squabbling about things that weren't important. Our faith is supposed to be a very active kind of faith, one that leads to godliness.

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Titus 1:1

***<sup>1</sup>This letter is from Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives.***

Read through the Bible and you will see this kind of active relationship between God and His people. There is nothing passive about it. I could go on and on about this.

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1 Timothy 4:7-10

***<sup>7</sup> Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup> "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come."*** ***<sup>9</sup> This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it. <sup>10</sup> This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.***

I see this kind of active language right from Genesis all the way to Revelation. I see words like struggle, strain, train, wrestle, press on, etc. These all denote an active partnering with God, not, a wait and see attitude. So, in regards to our prayer life, and as it relates to our spiritual growth we need to purposefully partner with God.

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***7 “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.***

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The next thing we notice here is that **prayer is persistent**. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. Sometimes we give up too quickly. We pray once and God doesn't answer so we give up.

In the parallel passage in Luke 11 Jesus told a parable to illustrate this.

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**Luke 11:5-8 (NLT)**

***5 Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, 6 ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’***

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***7 And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ 8 But I tell you this—though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.***

We don't want to get too carried away when interpreting this text. This parable isn't describing the character of God. The only thing that Jesus is illustrating here is our persistence in prayer. And what He is saying is don't give up until you get your answer, even if the answer is "No.". Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. Maybe the answer is "No". That's when you stop.

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Next, notice that **prayer is intimate**.

***9 “You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? 10 Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! 11 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.***

What kind of picture do you have of your Father God? Is He distant? Is He unapproachable? Is He the kind of Father who is just waiting for you to screw up so He can pounce on you and make you feel small? And incidentally, when we judge and condemn, we do just that to others. Our goal when we judge to make others feel small so we can somehow feel better about ourselves.

What's your Father God like? Paint a picture in your mind of the best possible Father. Use your imagination. Go way outside the bounds of what a good father should be like. I'm not say that we should create God in our own image. That would be idolatry. What I am saying though is that no matter how loving a picture of God you can paint in your mind, God is more loving and gracious than you could ever dream of.

Your earthly father may want to be, or if he is no longer living, he may have wanted to be everything a father should be for his children, but the fact is nobody can be the perfect father because, as Jesus said in verse 11, we are all tainted with sin. No matter how good an earthly father is or wants to be he is nothing compared to what your Father God in heaven is.

God **is** always there for you. He will **never** leave you or forsake you. He **always** does what is ultimately best for you. And unlike your earthly father, he **can** and **will** fulfill all of His promises because he is able. He's not bound by the same restrictions or the sin that we are.

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**James 1:16-18 (NLT)**

***16 So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. 18 He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.***

This is what God is like and yet sometimes we approach Him like He is someone to hide from. Or we go to Him as a last resort when we have exhausted all other possible solutions. Our relationship with God should be the deepest and most intimate relationship that we have. There should be nothing that we are not willing to go to Him with.

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## Matthew 7:7-12 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> ***“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.***

Finally,

<sup>12</sup> ***“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.***

This brings things back to the original topic of judging. When we arrogantly judge and condemn others what we are doing is wresting control from God. We are taking matters into our own hands. We aren't asking how God is involved in this. We aren't entreating him to act on our behalf. When we judge and condemn we are, in essence, telling God that we can handle things ourselves. We have what it takes to be the judge of hearts and motives.

Instead of doing that, we should do two things. First of all, pray to the God who knows how to judge hearts, motives, and intentions. And then ask ourselves, how would we like others to treat us if the roles were reversed? If we did these two things when deciding how to relate to others, and before making decisions that affect others, just think what a difference that would make in our relationships and community. How would I like to be treated? What does love look like? Am I treating others with respect? How would I react if someone treated me the way that I treat them?

Take it to God in prayer. Ask these kinds of questions, and then do the right thing and trust God with the outcome.



**Ask, Seek, Knock**  
**Matthew 7:7-12**  
**Week of June 22nd, 2014**

**Objective of this study:** To apply prayer and the Golden Rule to our tendency to judge others.

**Worship** (5 – 10 minutes)

- I. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
- II. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read Psalm 25:1-9 meditatively to the group. (after each phrase, or paragraph if it's a long Psalm, pause and let the Lord speak to you before reading the next)
- III. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

**Welcome** (5 – 10 minutes)

Who is your favorite judge on one of the various TV talent shows? What do you like about how they respond to contestants?

**Word** (30 - 40 minutes)

- I. What stood out for you from the sermon?
- II. Read Matthew 7:6-12.
- III. Verse 6:

Sermon quote: **Sharing the Gospel with someone before they are ready is "like trying to feed a newborn baby a nice big juicy steak. It only serves to choke them."**

How can we discern how ready someone is? or what they are ready for? How can we help prepare their heart to be ready?

- IV. Verses 7-12:

Sermon quote: **Normally we read this section on prayer as if it's isolated from the previous part on judging, but it is very much linked. What Jesus is saying here is, "Don't do things the natural way," which is to exalt ourselves above others...We think that if we can find someone who is worse than us we will be judged less harshly.**

What, in fact, does Jesus say is the way to be judged less harshly? See Mt. 7:2.

- V. Verses 7- 11:

Sermon quote: **In this section on prayer, Jesus is saying, "Don't try to get from people what only God can give." Go to God instead.**

When we judge others, what are we trying to get from them?

VI. This passage is about our prayer relationship with God the Father. First, prayer is a very ACTIVE kind of relationship. Right from the beginning, God created us to be actively involved in life with him. See Genesis 1:27-28; 2:15, 19-20. **God is sovereign but he has also given us the will to choose.** He did not intend for us to be passive. **Even before the Fall in Genesis his way was to partner with his people. We are to be all about working with him to create places of flourishing and life.**

If we miss seeing this activeness that God desires for us, what will be the result? What could we miss out on?

VII. The second thing we notice here is that prayer is persistent. As you have been persistent in prayer, what have you learned? How have you gotten to know God better? What is something you'd like to be persistent in prayer about?

VIII. Third, prayer is intimate. The picture Jesus is painting here is of a parent-child relationship. See how Jesus felt about little children in Mark 10:13-16. Stop and think for a moment. Imagine your prayer life being more like a parent-child relationship. How would it change? Think about this as you are praying this week.

- IX. Verse 12:

When we arrogantly judge and condemn others, we are wresting control from God. Instead, we should do two things. First, pray to God who knows how to judge hearts, motives, and intentions. And then ask ourselves, how would we like others to treat us if the roles were reversed? If we did just this one thing when deciding how to relate to others, just think what a difference that would make in our relationships and community. How would I like to be treated? What does love look like? Am I treating others

with respect? How would I react if someone treated me the way that I treat them? Ask these kinds of questions, and then do the right thing and trust God with the outcome.

### **HOMEWORK**

Pay attention to your thought life this week, and catch yourself judging others. Think about how to love and bless the person instead, even if you need to confront them.