

"What Man is There Among You?"

Matthew 7:7-12

How many of you out there remember those Charles Atlas ads in sports magazines and comic books? You know, the one where a skinny guy is sitting on the beach with his girl friend and a big guy kicks sand in their faces? The skinny guy stands up and tells the big guy to 'Watch what you're doing Buddy!' and the big guy pipes back with something like 'you're so skinny I'm afraid you would shrivel up. The skinny young man goes home, sends away for a free Charles Atlas get muscle program and in a few weeks looks pretty buff. Then he goes back to the beach, punches the bully in the face and his girlfriend says 'Now you're a real man!'

There's always been pressure on men (and women) to be what society defines as 'A Real Man!' or a "Real Woman!" Because its Father's Day I'll focus on men to start with. Usually it had to do with toughness; how to handle a gun like a gunslinger of the west. Being cool and hip like Elvis or James Dean. Being strong, being a good athlete, being a handy fix it guy, smart with business, etc. And on and on it goes.

What did Jewish society in Jesus' day hold up as the ideal man? It would seem when you read the New Testament that a man of God was the ideal. And the pinnacle of manhood was someone like a Pharisee, an expert in the Law, a wealthy and powerful political figure who sat on the Sanhedrin. Jesus of course didn't fit that standard and taught all people a different way of being "successful", to be a person whom God was pleased with. In the Sermon on the Mount we see Jesus attacking the society's value system set by the religious leaders of course of who is valued. Not the rich or powerful but the poor in Spirit. Not the proud but the meek. Not the persecutor but the persecuted. The whole Sermon on the Mount speaks to God's standards as opposed to what the world defines as a successful man or woman. In Ch. 6 He directly says don't be like the religious leaders who pray long and loud, show you they are fasting by putting sackcloth on their heads and make sure you know they give alms. Don't try and impress people by you're supposed spirituality instead give quietly, fast without changing your outward appearance and pray like this, and Jesus then uses the Lord's prayer as a model for praying.

This theme of trying to impress people or worrying about what people think comes back here in Ch. 7 when Jesus says 'don't criticize your brother because of a speck in their eye when you have a plank to pull out. You're still comparing yourself with people and trying to live by their standards and not God's.' Then Jesus comes back to prayer according to God's standards in vv.7-11. Why? Probably because prayer was the standard by which men especially in Jesus' day were spiritually measured.

⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Why did Jesus say don't be like them? Because everybody thought that's what a man of God does! So they did want to be like them. Jesus says, God doesn't hear you because you're long, loud

and look spiritual. He listens to you because He's Your Father. So Jesus appeals to men as dads. What man among you when His son asks will not give what he needs?

Jesus encourages men (and women) that a 'success' is one who prays to God believing that He will answer. But I'm lousy at prayer. I don't know what to ask. My mind drifts. I'm just not very spiritual. And Jesus says 'I know your shortcomings but I also know you and what you can do. Here's something I never noticed before in v.11,

¹¹ *If you, then, though you are evil,*

Jesus Knows Who We Are ... **(7:11a)**

He's talking to disciples here and acknowledges their evil tendencies. 'You who are evil'. Jesus knows we fail. He knows we don't pray well. He knows we're not the spiritual leaders we should be. He knows we struggle at prayer or being consistent in our Bible reading and church attendance or lack fellowship with other believers. And He also knows we're rarely late for work, or are more consistent at golf or exercise or other activities we enjoy that only give us temporal joy than participating in exercises that grow us into Christlikeness which gives us eternal rewards. He knows we have a sin nature and still have evil tendencies. He knows all this ...

But He Chooses to Focus on Who We Can Be **(7:11b)**

¹¹ *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,*

In spite of our many spiritual logs in our own eyes Jesus says you know how to give good gifts to your children. And that's what God is like. You're His child and He wants to give us good things if you ask. Jesus believes in you and me. We need to believe in Jesus to have a relationship with Him and God and when we do we find out that they believe in us. So much so that God is committed to making us like Jesus. And Jesus lived to please His Father. And now Jesus sits at the right hand of God and "lives to intercede for us" (Heb. 7:25).

I don't believe I can live like Jesus and live a life dependent on God. Jesus says, I believe you can. I believe

You can show goodness like God (vv.9-10)

How? Jesus says, 'Are you a good father, a good parent?' "Yes, mostly", we would respond. If you're child asks you for bread are you going to give him a rock? We're going to immediately say 'No' but we have to think Jewish for a second. When you think of Jewish bread think of flatbread, like pita or naan bread. Bread of course is the basic need. You ate it every day and it was your cutlery as well. Why does Jesus compare bread and a stone? Because stones can look like bread. A small round stone can look like a small round loaf of bread. What did Satan suggest to Jesus to turn into bread? Something that looked like bread. A good father is not going to trick his son who asks for something basic like bread and give him something that looks like bread but won't meet his needs. He's going to give Him the true thing he needs. As will God when we pray to Him. He's not going to give us a lookalike substitute.

In the second illustration. *Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?* Jesus may be making a connection between what is clean to eat and what is not. The word for snake can refer to any legless, creeping or swimming creature. The word is usually translated serpent. When fisherman caught fish in large nets they had to separate what they caught. Only that which could be eaten would be saved. Things that they weren't allowed to eat were thrown back. The only way these two are connected would be if they were both caught in the same net. No, a father would not give his child something that goes against God's Word to eat.

¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Jesus believes we can show the goodness of God to others as well as

Give children what they need (vv.11a-b)

The father/child examples are illustrations of the point Jesus is making about prayer. And He's challenging His disciples to pray to God who won't trick you by not giving you what is untrue nor will He tempt you by giving you what is harmful. He's going to meet your physical and spiritual needs. So if God (who is not evil) can do all this for you – giving you what you physically and spiritually need, then Jesus believes we should be praying consistently for God to meet our physical and spiritual needs of our physical families and spiritual families.

Remember the context of much of the Sermon on the Mount; don't be like the religious leaders who may look impressive and even spiritually intimidating ["how can I be like those guys?"] because that's not what impresses God. If God is Your Father because you have believed in Jesus as your Saviour than you can be so much more than those guys. So you can lead your family and help your spiritual family by praying to God to meet their physical and spiritual needs. Did not Jesus say to His disciples in 5:21

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

"But I'm lousy at prayer", we're all thinking. Don't we sound a lot like Moses complaining to God that He made a mistake to choose us to lead? We keep comparing ourselves with others who pray longer, more eloquently or personally than us. 'We can't be like them'. Don't be like them Jesus says. You just need to

⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

While Jesus was challenging his male disciples, He is

Challenging All of Us to Pray Boldly **(7:7)**

Prayer is obviously a really big deal to God and Jesus because this is the second time He's spoken on this in His message from the Mount of Olives. He already said not to pray like the people you think know how to pray – they don't. It's all a show. Instead if God is Your Father, pray for His glory to be revealed, His will to be done, for your physical needs and your spiritual needs. And now He's repeating it from a different angle. Now He's challenging us that the best thing we can do as

men and women leaders in our homes or workplace or school or athletic field or whatever group/club we are involved with is to pray boldly for God's glory to be revealed, His will to be done and their physical and spiritual needs to be met. How do we pray boldly?

With persistence (vv.7-8)

Ask, seek and knock are not so much synonyms but progressive steps. You make a request to God – ask. No answer yet. You seek God's face by continuing to ask it. You even seek for ways God may be directing you. If you need a job you'll pray for a job but you'll also apply to different places, praying that God will direct You. If you're not sure where to go to college or university you're going to search some out and apply to those you feel are good fits, and pray that God will direct you. So seeking implies do your part also.

Knocking on a door signifies that you'll persist until it opens unless of course God clearly directs you elsewhere. These are in the continual sense. Ask, seek, knock. He will give, you will find and the door will be opened. That's it. No spiritual catch phrases [repeat Lord 500 times]? He doesn't mention we have to say 'In Jesus' Name' or 'if the Lord wills'. Jesus just reduced prayer to 3 words: Ask, seek, knock. Jesus said God is a good Father and won't deceive you and only gives you what you spiritually and physically need. Even we can do that.

So we are to pray with persistence and

With faith in the goodness of God (v.11c)

Jesus used a familiar form of argument, from the lesser to the greater or from the light to the heavy. He makes a lighter point to prove a heavier point. If you with evil tendencies can give your children the things they need "how much more will Your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him."

God answers prayer. His answer is always what's good for us to make us into the spiritual people He desires. So we pray with faith believing the answer will be good even if it's not what we expected. And we have to model this to others as well. To encourage them to believe in God's goodness and plan for us even if it seems off or unusual to us. People look up to us so we need to know what to share what God says in His Word.

7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

What does v.12 have to do with prayer in vv.7-11? Again, the whole message from Jesus is don't follow the teachings of the religious leaders who have twisted the Word of God. Everything they do is for show; it's externals. The problem is, everyone looked up to them and thought they had to be like them. So, don't listen to their judging you (7:1) for the specks in your eye when they have logs in their own. And don't criticize others the way they do, comparing them by your standards. You're impressed by their prayer life and how close they seem to God. Don't believe it. You can be closer to God than they are because you actually believe Jesus is the Messiah and have a relationship with God. Prayer is simply trusting a good God to provide for our spiritual and physical needs. You don't need flowery words, just persistence. God is there. He hears and sees everything. Now that you know these things about the religious leaders, you still need to treat them kindly. This is why Jesus says this here. He's telling all of us

To Treat People Graciously (7:12)

Because that's how God treats you. There was a familiar saying in Jesus' day that the great Rabbi Hillel was known to say. A Gentile once challenged him to summarize the whole Law in the time he stood on one leg. Rabbi Hillel said,

Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow; this is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary.

Jesus' quote is similar but He makes it proactive. Don't just not mistreat people, instead do God's good to others. That's what God does for you. Treat people the way you want to be treated.

Stop criticizing God's people and anyone according to your standards. The disciples didn't like how the Pharisees criticized them so, don't do it to others. Jesus acknowledged that we are evil and have a sin nature we stills struggle with so extend grace to others. God does it for us so act like God.

Men get dumped on a lot for not living up to the world's ideas of manliness. Jesus says, lead by praying. We've got access to God through Jesus by the Spirit. Most of us ain't too good with flowery words. So Jesus brings it down to our level; ask, seek, knock. Pray for the physical and spiritual needs of your family.

Whether we are guys or girls, adults or kids, we're always being pressured to live by the world's standards. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said 'Here's God's standards. He wrote the book. He set the standard. He extends a lot of grace. Be like Him and you won't go wrong. Your identity is in Him. Repeat these words to affirm who you are in Christ:

I am a child of God, a person in whom Christ dwells, an inhabitant of eternity bought by the blood of Christ and infused with His power and presence. [From "The Good and Beautiful God", By James Bryan Smith]

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If you have any comments or questions please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net