SEEKING GOD'S HELP TO PERSEVERE

1. Introduction

a. Seeking to walk out the kingdom lifestyle as described in Matthew 5-6 is challenging especially when it impacts on our relationships with others as we considered last time. Our challenge is to seek first the kingdom (6:33) or to love God with all of our heart even when we are tempted to be critical of others (7:1-5) or when we are criticized by others (7:6).

b. In Matthew 7 Jesus follows on to address how we should respond to this challenge and maintain a kingdom lifestyle.

Matt. 7:7-12 *[7] "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [8] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [9] Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? [10] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? [11] 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! [12] "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

c. Jesus calls us to pray for God's help with perseverance and confidence. Prayer is a most amazing privilege; in which we can enter into the presence of the most high God. Yet the fact remains that often we can neglect to engage in this privilege. The greatest invitation in the world is extended to us, and incomprehensibly we regularly turn away to other things.

When you pause to consider that God is infinitely strong and can do all that he pleases, and that he is infinitely righteous so that he only does what is right, and that he is infinitely good so that everything he does is perfectly good, and that he is infinitely wise so that he always knows perfectly what is right and good, and that he is infinitely loving so that in all his strength and righteousness and goodness and wisdom he raises the eternal joy of his loved ones as high as it can be raised — when you pause to consider this, then the lavish invitations of this God to ask him for good things, with the promise that he will give them, is unimaginably wonderful. John Piper

d. We are not to trust our natural strengths but to continually seek God for sustaining grace (7:7-8). Wholehearted pursuit of loving Jesus requires persistent asking, seeking, and knocking in our pursuit of a greater breakthrough spiritually and relationally.

   i ***Ask:*** for God's supernatural intervention to touch us and those we are in tension with

   ii ***Seek:*** for God's wisdom on how to walk in the 8 beatitudes and/or to solve tensions

   iii ***Knock:*** to overcome obstacles (closed doors) that hinder our growth and/or reconciliation

e. The disciple's abiding relationship with God (Jn. 15:5) is the key to breakthrough. In view of our weakness, we pray with perseverance for God's help and maintain a dialogue with Him. As we saw when we looked at the beatitudes; to be poor in spirit is to recognize our inability to walk out kingdom values or solve relational problems in our own natural strength.

f. Faith refuses to be denied. All who ask in God's will are sure to receive, all who seek will find, and all who keep knocking will eventually see the opening of the door and the obstacle removed. There is always a greater measure of grace to experience—renewing grace, enlightening grace, and empowering grace, etc.

James 4:6 *But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

Heb.4:16 *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

g. The Father uses prayer to draw us into deeper relationship with Himself and to produce in us gratitude, humility, and love. God is not unaware of or unconcerned about our needs. Before going to a brother or sister, we ask God to reveal our deficiencies in the relationship and to show us where we contributed to the wounded relationship. We take time to ask the Lord how He sees the other person and to give us insight on how we can humble ourselves.

2. Seeking God

a. We are called to seek God with both perseverance and confidence:

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

b. We are to **persevere** knowing that we will be answered in God's timing and way.

i Jesus called us to ask and keep on asking, to seek and keep on seeking, and to knock and keep on knocking. The verbs are in the continuous present tense indicating that it is something we are to do consistently.

ii There is an asking which is casual, where we put little effort into seeking God, because it is not something we value. When it is highly prized, we search for it as hidden treasure.

Jer.29:13 *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

Prov.2:4-5 *if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures [5] then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.*

iii Paul called us to pray with all perseverance and exhorted us to "strive" and "struggle" in prayer. If we truly understand the power and privilege of prayer we will persevere and not give up.

Eph.6:18 *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all <u>perseverance</u>,*

Romans 15:30 *I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to <u>strive</u> together with me in your prayers to God*

Col.4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always <u>struggling</u> on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.*

c. However, this is not a place of hard labour because we know that as His children we ask our Father with **confidence** in His goodness (7:9-11).

Matt.7:9-11 *[9] Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? [10] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? [11] 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 Jesus encourages us to pray by showing us that our heavenly Father is better than our earthly father and will far more certainly give good things to us than they did. There is no evil in our heavenly Father like there is in our earthly father.

ii Our view of God is so important. He is not reluctant but is our heavenly Father who gives good gifts in answer to prayer. Jesus goes beyond the encouragement of merely saying that God is your Father, and says that God is always better than your earthly father, because all earthly

fathers are evil and God is not. We must not ever limit our understanding of the fatherhood of God to our experience of your own father. Rather, we take heart that God has none of the sins or limitations or weaknesses or hang–ups of our earthly fathers.

iii God is always better. In him there is no evil. Therefore, the argument is strong: if your earthly father gave you good things (or even if he didn't!), how much more will your heavenly Father give good things — always good things to those who ask.

3. The golden rule

a. Jesus called us all to the "Golden Rule" (7:12) as He continued to talk about relationships.

Matt. 7:11–12 *[11] 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! [12] "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

b. ***The kingdom principle:*** Whatever we want others to do for us is what we are to do to them (7:12). Our actions are not determined by how people treat us, but by how we *desire* them to treat us (7:12) and by how graciously the Father gives to us.

c. Love fulfils all that the Law and Prophets taught in Old Testament. True spirituality is not only devout, but is kind to people. The way we speak when praying to God should be the same way we speak when talking to the people who bother us.

4. Enter the narrow gate (Mt 7:13-14)

a. Those who profess to be believers seek Jesus in two very different ways. Some choose the broad way (7:13), others the narrow way (7:14). We are strengthened to enter the narrow gate by consistently asking, seeking, and knocking to experience more of God's help (7:7).

[13] "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

b. The narrow way is difficult on our flesh, because it requires self-denial (Mt. 16:24) and thinking with a renewed mind

Matt. 16:23-24. *[23] But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." [24] Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*

c. Jesus exhorted us to strive, or to exert effort, to enter the narrow gate of obedience. We do not strive to earn forgiveness, but rather to position ourselves for a greater breakthrough in the heart.

Luke 13:24 *"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*

d. Striving has two very different meanings in the New Testament. We are not to strive ***to earn*** God's love. However, we *are* to strive in the sense of ***putting effort*** into our relationship with God, similar to how we put effort into our relationships with family and friends, etc. Striving, in this sense, is an expression of love. If we do not strive in this way, by putting effort into the relationship, then we are not loving God with all our heart and strength.

i ***Wrong striving:*** We must never strive to receive God's love (acceptance or forgiveness). It has been freely given to us because of Jesus' work on the cross. To strive to earn God's love denies the foundational truths of the gospel. It is also wrong to strive in the sense of seeking to

establish our own agenda or to strive to make people respond to our ministry or ideas by pressuring them.

ii ***Biblical striving:*** Jesus calls us to exert great effort in walking in the narrow way (Mt. 7:13-14). We strive to obey God (Lk. 13:24; Acts 24:16; Heb. 12:4) in ministry (Col. 1:29), in prayer (Rom. 15:30), for unity (Phil. 1:27) and in being diligent to enter God's rest (Heb. 4:11), disciplining our body (1 Cor. 9:27), and pressing into God (Phil. 3:12-15).

e. Some see contradiction between this idea of striving and Jesus' statement that His yoke is easy and finding rest.

Matt.11:29-30 *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ***30*** *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

f. However, Jesus did not contradict Himself in Mt. 7:13 and Mt. 11:29. The truth is seen in considering both passages. Rest in this context is a spiritual rest for our soul and not a physical rest for our flesh. The opposite of rest is not diligence; it is restlessness with its emotional turmoil. Lazy people are often very restless, spiritually and emotionally.

g. Taking Jesus' yoke is not about receiving forgiveness but embracing meekness. We are to be yoked to Jesus and His lifestyle— which is difficult on our flesh but easy on our heart. The easy yoke is to have peace in our heart as we deny our flesh by ceasing to fight for our honour, recognition, and comfort, etc. Great freedom comes to our heart by renouncing all our agendas that compete with Jesus' perfect will in our life.

h. What is *difficult* to our flesh is often an easy yoke to our heart (spiritually and emotionally). What is *easy* to our flesh is often difficult on our heart (spiritually and emotionally). Some believers seek in vain for an "easy" path for their flesh that is also "easy" for their heart.

5. Conclusion

a. Living out the sermon on the mount lifestyle is challenging and will require us to persevere and to live in way that may be difficult on our earthly man. However, we are not of this world but of another Kingdom and we have a Father who will provide all that we need.

b. If we determine to enter the narrow way, recognising our human frailty but trusting in His grace, asking, seeking, knocking, we will know the joy and peace of rest in Him and the eternal rewards of the age to come. We have a good Father and He is cheering us on to the finish line and able to "keep us" to the end.

Isaiah 26:3 *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.*