

# Session 8

## GOING AGAINST THE FLOW

*Matthew 7:7-14*

### Memory Verse

<sup>7</sup> *“Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

– MATTHEW 7:7-8, CSB




## Going Against the Flow

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** The theological theme of this passage is the believer's position before the Father on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. These activities described in this passage are of those whose hearts are turned toward Christ, who have found and stay on the narrow way.

 What do you know about prayer? What comes to mind when you hear the word prayer?

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 Is prayer a regular part of your life? What helps or hinders your prayer life?

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What a wonderful thing that Christians are commanded to pray and serve others. In fact, one of the greatest ways a Christian can serve others is by praying for them. Jesus Christ obligated those who trusted in Him to boldly petition the Father. Of course, they come to the Father through Christ and stand before Him guiltless because Jesus took on their guilt. Some may think of the commands of God as drudgery. They may even see this command as a burdensome duty to shoulder. Christians need a different perspective. John Piper can help us recapture the essence of prayer. He said:

*“Is intentional, regular, disciplined, earnest, Christ-dependent, God-glorifying, joyful prayer a duty, a discipline? Do I go to prayer meetings Tuesday morning, Wednesday afternoon, Friday morning, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday morning because it’s a duty, out of discipline? You could call it that.*

*It’s a duty the way it’s a duty for a scuba diver to put on his air tank before he goes underwater.*

*It’s a duty the way pilots should listen to air-traffic controllers.*

*It’s a duty the way soldiers in combat should clean their rifles and load their guns.*

*It’s a duty the way hungry people eat food.*

*It’s a duty the way thirsty people drink water.*

*It’s a duty the way a deaf man puts on his hearing aid.*

*It’s a duty the way a diabetic takes his insulin.*

*It’s a duty the way Winnie the Pooh looks for honey.*

*It’s a duty the way pirates look for gold.*

*So, you could call it duty if you want.”<sup>1</sup>*

As we study this passage today, let’s remember that for the Christian prayer, is the direct line to their Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and God. For the Christian, to live and breathe is to pray. Further, Christians should serve others by praying for them. This is what life on the narrow way (7:13-14) looks like: laboring in prayer on behalf of others. The narrow way is a life of dependence upon God and service to others.

## Session Summary

It is fitting that Jesus would teach about prayer and service to others in a sermon directed towards those who loved and trusted Him. Further, it makes sense that these would be so closely linked to the life of a believer on the narrow way. Christians come to God through prayer, and they come to God in prayer on behalf of those around them. In our lesson today we will reflect upon various aspects of Christian prayer and how prayer isn’t meant only to bring our own needs to God, but to serve others in prayer. This is life on the narrow way as referenced by Jesus in Matthew 7:13-14.

## 1. You Must Ask (Matt. 7:7)

Jesus taught His disciples that they ought not to shrink away from prayer. In fact, He commanded it. There is no doubt that children of God fear God, but this isn't the sort of fear that causes one to avoid contact or interaction. Rather, love and reverence comprise the sort of fear that Christians ought to have for God. This good and fitting fear draws God's children toward Him, instead of driving them away. The way that Christians approach God is in Christ through prayer.



What kind of praying did Jesus command of His followers? What was implied about their approach from the description of prayer in this verse?

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Jesus directly stated that Christians must boldly ask their Father. Christians ought to expect God's ready response when they come before Him with their petitions. This is true when they are bringing their own needs before Him, but it is also true when they intercede and petition on behalf of others. It is a great privilege and power when Christians utilize their position in Christ to seek the good of others. Christians are a blessing to those around them when they bring their needs boldly to the Father.

It is important to understand why Christians can come before God boldly in prayer. Hebrews 4:14-16 is useful as we rightly understand Christian boldness before the Father. This passage (indeed, the whole book) expresses the all-important doctrine of mediation. Jesus Christ is the great High Priest who has come before God on the Christian's behalf to make atonement for their sin. Now that Jesus' righteousness is credited to the Christian's account, they also have the privilege to approach the throne. Christians can do so boldly because of the nature of the mediation. Jesus' sacrifice was the perfect and final atoning sacrifice. Christian boldness isn't based on anything inherent in them, but in the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice. This boldness isn't mingled with pride or self-justification. Rather, this boldness rests fully and firmly in the completed work of Christ on the cross on the Christian's behalf.

**?** What is a suitable petition for a child of God? For what should a Christian pray or not pray?

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The Bible gives no list of items that are prohibited from the realm of prayer. What the Scriptures do make clear is the fact that Christians should be bold, confident, and humble when approaching God in petition. Nothing is off-limits. Christians are to cast all of their cares on Him, no matter how small or embarrassing. They are to ask for great things, for nothing is too great for God.

**?** Application: In your experience with prayer, have you approached God by trusting in the finished work of Jesus or in something else? Why is it important to first trust in Christ before being able to pray in this way?

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## 2. You Will Be Answered (Matt. 7:8-11)

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith in this way: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The sort of faith that the Bible describes is different than the common use of the word in the English language today. We often associate faith with the idea of having a positive outlook and an optimistic expectation about what will happen. Biblical faith is different. The Christian’s faith is firmly grounded in God Himself. Christian faith doesn’t rest on their ability to make something happen, but in the person and character of the one true and living God. Christian faith is as certain as the rising sun because the object of Christian faith, God, is as certain as the rising sun.

**?** Does this mean that if Christians pray in faith, then they can expect results? Will God always answer Christians? Why is it necessary to pray with faith?

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When a child of God prays with faith to his or her heavenly Father, results are certain. But Christians must be careful not to impose upon God their will by demanding that the results He brings about match their expectations. God may very well answer no, but it is certain that He hears Christians and answers them.

James 1:5-8 is helpful with this question. James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

James wrote specifically in regard to obtaining wisdom in these verses, but there is a principle that can be applied to all petitions. Christians should ask in faith, not doubt. The key here is to understand that James was talking about the idea that Christians should immediately repent of doubting the ability and promises of God. He was not saying that Christians should never doubt or question their own motives, hearts, or interpretations. The promises and character of God that are made clear in Scripture are never to be doubted. But people are prone to misunderstandings and self-deception. So, it is good to doubt ourselves as we enter into prayer.



**Does Christian faith force God to give His people what they ask for? Is God obligated to always say yes to the petition if a person has sufficient faith?**

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God will do what is good and right always, but we don't always ask for what is good and right. It is, however, pleasing to God when Christians approach Him with faith. Christians don't attempt to wield faith as a weapon to hold God hostage until He gives them what they want. Rather, they approach God with faith because of who He is and what He has done in their lives. In other words, faith is the good and fitting posture for the redeemed as they approach God in prayer.

In fact, verses 9-11 clarify that God will only give His children good gifts. We need to let that truth sink in. God will not give His children evil gifts if they ask for good gifts. Furthermore, God will not give His children evil gifts, even if they ask for evil gifts.

Moreover, God determines what is a good gift and what is an evil gift. What we ask for, thinking that it is a good gift, may actually be an evil gift. And, what we think is an evil gift, may actually be a good gift. God has the wisdom to see these things and can be trusted.

**?** Application: When you pray is your heart submitted to God's authority and ready to receive with joy whatever answer He gives? Or do you become angry if God doesn't answer your prayers as you think that He should?

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### 3. Pray Also for Them (Matt. 7:12-14)

When Jesus spoke of the “narrow gate,” He was referring to the exclusive nature of His kingdom. There aren't multiple ways to eternal life. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The gate is considered narrow because there is only one path to eternal life. On the other hand, the wide gate that leads to hell is wide. The symbolism here suggests an unrestricted entrance that many will enter.

Christians go against the flow. Their lives look differently than the lives of people who have not submitted their lives to the one true and living God. These two paths are illustrated in Jesus' picture of the narrow gate and the wide gate. One of the ways that Christian lives look different is their praying. Prayer is foolishness to an unbelieving world. It is idiocy to someone who believes that the material is all that exists. If prayer is foolishness, then praying for others is lunacy. Christians are never more counter-cultural than when they are in their prayer closets pleading to their heavenly Father that He would save the soul of their neighbor, coworker, teacher, spouse, boss, child, or enemy.

Jesus commanded His followers, “Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (v. 12). In light of the immediate context, we may very well think of it like this: Therefore, whatever you want others to pray for you, pray also the same for them.



Why is prayer helpful and effective as a way to serve others?

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Prayer is effectual because the one to whom Christians pray is powerful. When a person approaches the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the name of Christ, then they have real access to the being that spoke creation into existence and split the Red Sea. Christians should highly value and esteem prayer and their petitions being brought before God. They should desire that other Christians pray for them. They should covet prayers. This is why the “Golden Rule” applies to prayer, perhaps more than any other activity. Just as Christians desire that others would pray on their behalf, they should pray for others.



What if someone doesn't desire prayer? What if they don't see the value in it? Should Christians still pray for them?

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Just because a person doesn't see the value in prayer doesn't mean that the usefulness and benefit of it is negated. Christians pray for others not because they are trying to please others, but because they know that it is one of the most loving and helpful things they can do for another. When Christians pray for someone who doesn't ask for it or even desire it, they reflect the character and goodness of their heavenly Father who gives good gifts to His children even when they desire evil gifts.



**Application:** How have you seen prayer as a way to serve others and treat them the way you want to be treated? How have you been saved by the prayers of others?


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## Conclusion

Christians go against the flow of the world around them. They walk along the narrow way that leads to life because they have heard the gospel call and responded with faith and repentance. Their hearts are oriented toward their Maker, and their desire is to obey Him. Two distinctives of those who are travelling toward the narrow gate are a life marked with prayer and acts of service toward others. These two work hand-in-hand as Christians labor in their private times of prayer to intercede for others.

 What does your prayer life reveal about your dependence upon God?


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 What does Christ's work on the cross have to do with prayer? Why does it matter? How is prayer related to a Christian's relationship with God?

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 How might praying for others provide opportunity for Christians to have gospel conversations with them?

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**CHRIST CONNECTION:** The saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ clears the way for a person to have access to and take hold of these commands.

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** A Christian's prayer life should be characterized by intercession for those who have yet to hear the gospel, don't have a Bible in their language, and who have no born-again believers living among them.



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## What is Your Foundation?

### Main Passages

- Matthew 7:15-28

### Session Outline

1. Be On Guard (Matt. 7:15)
2. Watch the Fruit (Matt. 7:16-23)
3. Build on God's Word (Matt. 7:24-29)

### Memorize

*<sup>7</sup> "Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

- Matthew 7:7-8, CSB

### Daily Readings

- Monday - Proverbs 3:5-6
- Tuesday - Psalm 20:7
- Wednesday - Isaiah 26:3
- Thursday - Psalm 56:4
- Friday - Hebrews 4:12
- Saturday - 2 Timothy 3:15-17

### References

<sup>1</sup>"How Can I Jumpstart My Prayer Life?" Desiring God, March 5, 2020.  
[https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-can-i-jumpstart-my-prayer-life.](https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-can-i-jumpstart-my-prayer-life)