

# OpenTheo

## Two Paths, Two Foundations (Part 1)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the importance of seeking guidance from God and taking proper steps towards a spiritual life. He emphasizes the need to pray in Jesus' name and to ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Gregg also highlights the significance of prioritizing good deeds and treating others as one would like to be treated. Overall, he stresses the importance of taking action in seeking a spiritual path rather than waiting until it is too late.

### **Transcript**

Alright, let's turn to Matthew 7 again. Last time we covered the first six verses, essentially. I kind of thought I would finish the Sermon on the Mount in one more session, but that may not be possible.

It kind of looks unlikely. So we'll just do as much as we can. Just by way of reminder, the first five verses had to do with judging, and a rebuke of those who would judge by a double standard, allowing themselves participation in activities that they would judge others negatively for doing.

This is what the scribes and Pharisees are said to have done. This is what Paul accuses the Jews of doing in Romans 2. And Jesus obviously felt that his disciples may be in danger of doing it too, since that's who he was speaking to. He told them not to do that.

But when he says do not judge, as we saw, he doesn't mean you shouldn't do any kind of judging, because he then goes on to give commands which would require a faculty of judgment to be operational in order to keep them, like don't give what is holy to dogs and don't cast pearls before swine. Since we do not assume that all people are considered dogs or swine in the particular sense that he means it here, one has to discern. Is a person to whom we are inclined to devote our time and energies and the message of the gospel, is that person worthy of those times and energies? Is this a good stewardship? Is this maybe compromising the mission in some respects? Are we giving away too much that could be used against the kingdom of God by those who are opposed to it? Anyway, those kind of judgments have to be made.

And we come now to verse 7, which is not particularly a statement about judging or requiring judgment in that sense, but we are not finished with passages in this chapter that will call upon us to make judgments again. For ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Or what man is there among you who if his son asks for bread will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will he give him a serpent? If you then, being 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? Now, I know that we've had occasion to use this verse in one or another way previously in the school. It clearly has something to do with praying. Ask and it will be given to you.

And he goes on to say, everyone who asks receives. Now, there is a bit of a problem here because not everyone who says prayers receives what they pray for. He doesn't even say ask with faith or anything like that, he just says ask.

Anyone who asks receives. Anyone who seeks finds. Everyone who knocks, the door will be opened to him.

And I have been inclined, like most people I think, even up to the present, to apply this verse to prayer in general. Just keep asking and God will give to you. The illustration is of a father who will not play a mean trick on his son.

If his son is in need of food, his father won't give him something he can't eat, like a stone or a serpent. A stone because it's intrinsically inedible. A serpent because it was an unclean animal.

In neither case could the son eat the thing given. And therefore, the son who had asked in good faith for something of value would be receiving something that was a cruel joke on the part of the parent. And he says, even human fathers don't do that, do they? Unfortunately, I have known of a few cases, I don't know them personally, but I've heard of cases.

And I hear them from sources I assume are telling the truth, of fathers who do cruel things to their children. I remember hearing about a man who took his young son and put him up on the table and said, jump to me and I'll catch you. And his son jumped and he stood back and let him fall on the ground.

And his father said, see, I wanted to teach you a lesson, never trust anybody. Well, no doubt the father thinks he's doing his son a favor in that way, but I have a feeling he's doing more damage than good. I mean, for one thing, if in any sense that son later has a tendency to transfer his ideas about his father to his ideas about God, as people say sometimes happens, or frequently happens, that might give him some difficulties in his

faith.

But beyond that, I mean, you simply have to trust some people at some level. If you don't trust anybody, even your own father, even your own father and mother, you certainly don't have a very strong sense of security in the world at all. You know, it's you against the whole world.

And that's not really the way God has made things. Generally speaking, it's not you against the whole world. There are a few unfortunate people, relatively few, who find themselves in that position, rejected by their parents, you know, abused by everybody.

But that certainly isn't the norm. Most people have some kind of a support group, some kind of a society that God has put them in. It says in Psalm 68 that God places the solitary in families.

And there's not really too many people out there who could claim that they don't have anyone that they can trust at some level. I don't think it's an awful good thing to play practical jokes on kids to teach them not to trust anybody, especially if you're one of the people they should learn to trust and that should prove trustworthy to them. Jesus perhaps knew that there were fathers who would do those kinds of things.

I mean, if they existed in his time. I'm sure there were all kinds of fathers, including the very worst types in those days, too. But Jesus assumed that they were rare enough that no one would think that to be typical, even of fathers who were not particularly godly.

He said that even people who don't have the love of God in their hearts, generally speaking, do not act cruelly toward their own children. He said that few fathers even being evil generally can be counted on to give good gifts to your children. How much more God, who obviously is not evil, can be expected to give good gifts to his children? This is a how much more kind of an argument.

If this is true, then how obviously it would be that this is even more true given a different set of premises. It's like the parable of the unjust judge that Jesus told in Luke 18, I believe it is, the beginning of that chapter. He said that there was a judge who didn't fear God or fear man or care about anybody.

But this widow had a case. Someone was oppressing her and she begged the judge to relieve her and vindicate her and he paid no attention to her. But she pestered him enough.

He finally gave in. People have been bothered by that parable because obviously it's a parable about prayer and the need to be persistent in prayer. And some say, well, is this saying that God is an unjust judge who doesn't care about us and he only answers our prayers when we pester him about it? Well, the obvious answer is no.

The parable is not a comparison but a contrast. If an unjust judge who cares nothing about you or your needs can be persuaded by your persistence to grant you what you want, how much more God, who doesn't have that kind of disposition, God who does care about you, how much more will he vindicate his elect, those that he does care about? Well, this is the same kind of an idea. You earthly fathers are evil.

You still give good things to children, generally speaking, with maybe some exceptions. But how much more would God, who is not in any sense evil, give good things to those who ask him? Now, on the asking it will be given to you, I'd like to suggest to you the possibility that he's got a particular thing in mind rather than giving a teaching on prayer in general. Now, I don't want to deprive you of a good scripture about prayer in general.

This idea that if earthly fathers who are evil know how to give good things to their children, how much more will God give good things to those who ask him? I do believe the principle can be extended to any good thing, anything that is genuinely good that you ask for. Of course, God is the judge of what's good for you. What you think is a good thing, he may know is not a good thing and may withhold it from you.

It says in the Psalms, no good thing will he withhold from him who walks uprightly. There's a fair number of things that he withholds. Even things that we thought would be good.

Good enough that we asked for them, but we didn't get them. But we have to trust what the scripture says, that if the thing he withheld, the thing we asked for was withheld from us, it was not a good thing in God's judgment. And we can say in general about this scripture as well, God gives good things to those who ask him and it can be counted on to do so every time.

It just depends on your willingness to let him be the decision maker as to what is good. Because what you ask for may not be the thing granted if he knows it's not good for you. For example, if a child asked for a fish, the father wouldn't give him a serpent.

But if the child asked for a serpent, the father still wouldn't give him a serpent. If the child asked for something that is truly good, the father would of course give him something that is good. Probably the very thing he asked for and not something that's evil.

If the child asked for something that will do him harm, a good father will not give him that either and will deprive him of evil things that the child asked for. Though a child might think that playing with a viper would be a very fun thing to do. Or that playing with razor blades would be a fun thing to do.

Or playing with caustic chemicals or something. Obviously there are times when we have to say no to our children because we love them, although they think the thing we're

depriving them of would be a very wonderful thing to possess. We know better.

And God does not oblige himself in any passage of scripture to give you anything you ask for without condition. Now it is true that all the conditions for receiving a thing are not mentioned in every place that prayer is discussed. In 1 John 5.14 it says that if we ask anything according to his will, we know that he hears us.

And if we know that he hears us, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of him. So there's a condition if we ask according to his will. Now that condition isn't stated in so many terms every place that prayer is discussed, but it is implied.

It's part of the whole counsel of God on the subject that needs to be brought into the consideration. Certainly Jesus taught in a number of places that faith was a necessary element in getting prayers answered. James makes that very clear too.

James says, let the person ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. Do not let that man think that he'll receive anything from the Lord. That is, the man who's wavering in his faith cannot really expect that he'll receive what he's asking from the Lord.

Faith is a necessary condition. And especially the upper room discourse in John chapter 13 and following, several chapters long, Jesus emphasizes repeatedly that one must ask in his name. And he gives the disciples the privilege of asking in his name.

And people sometimes mistakenly thought since Jesus said, whatever you ask in my name, I'll give it to you. Anything, just ask in my name. That all we have to do is ask for whatever we selfishly desire and then tag on the end of our prayer, I ask this in Jesus' name.

And somehow that obliges God to give you what you ask for. This is a common way of misunderstanding the promise of Jesus on these subjects. But it fails to recognize what it means to ask in somebody's name.

To do something in the name of another is to do so as his representative. And to do so in his authority and to do so along the lines that he would do himself. It's quite obvious that if a person is an ambassador to a foreign country, he has to act in the interest of the country that sent him.

He can sign documents, he can do all kinds of things in the name of his government. But he can't do them if they're not in the interest of his government. He's not there to do his own thing.

He's not there to seek his own agendas. He's there to represent the interest of his government and he has the name of the king or he has whatever authority is given to him to act in the name of the one who sends him. And so also we can pray in Jesus'

name.

But what that essentially means is we're praying for things that are in Christ's interest. We're praying for the very things he would pray for if he were on his knees in this place at this moment. And in so doing, we limit ourselves to what kinds of things we would pray for.

I might want to pray for a Winnebago RV, but I don't know if Jesus would pray for me to have one of those if he were here. I'm not here to pray for the things that are selfish. Now, if I had reason to believe that that was something God wanted me to have, then there would be nothing wrong with praying for it.

Because I should pray only for such things as I believe Jesus would pray for if he were here, the things that are in his interest. That's what it means to pray in his name. In another place, in John chapter 15, Jesus said, If you abide in me and my word abides in you, you can ask what you will and it will be given to you.

This is the one verse that the Word of Faith people latch on to, to the exclusion of all the others I've been referring to. Because they say, you see, it says you can ask what you want. It's you, your will, not God's, the functional power here.

And yet, of course, they miss the conditions even in that verse. If my words are abiding in you and you're abiding in me, what does this mean? If you're abiding in Christ in the vine, and that's in the context, by the way, the statement is in the context of the vine and the branches. It's the same chapter, the same parable.

I think it's verse 7, if I'm not mistaken, of John 15. To abide in Christ is like a vine abiding in a branch. I mean, the branch abiding in the vine.

The branch draws its entire life and draws its entire existence from the vine. And it's quite obvious that our connection to Jesus provides that his spirit and his life operate in us. And to be activated and motivated and guided by the spirit in our praying will certainly cause us to desire the things that God desires too, and we'll pray properly.

If we are abiding in him and his word is abiding in us in that sense, then we can ask whatever we want to because the very act of abiding in him causes him to be at work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. And so Paul says repeatedly we need to pray in the Holy Spirit. Pray in the Holy Spirit.

The sap of the vine, the life of the vine that is shared by all the branches abiding in the vine is analogous to the life of Jesus, which is the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ in him. It's shared by us as we're connected in him and becomes our life as well. And praying in the Holy Spirit suggests we have to be guided by the spirit in our prayers.

We have to be energized by the spirit in our prayers. I mean, there's a lot of conditions

for answered prayer, and I don't want to say all those as if to say, Hey, don't count on very many prayers getting answered unless you've gone through this extensive checklist here. It's not a question of a checklist.

It's just a question of habitually praying in the proper manner. I mean, it's just a matter of being unselfish and God-concerned and praying for such things as you really have reason to believe are his will and so forth. And it's not really that complex.

But there are a lot of passages that give various conditions or qualifications upon the general promise, just ask and you'll get it. I mean, there are some qualifiers elsewhere. Now, I would like to say in this particular case, ask and it will be given to you, verse 7, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you, that it is possible there is a progression here that would guide us to a particular thing he's telling them to seek or ask for.

That he's not talking about prayer in general, but some more specific pursuit. He said at the end of chapter 6 in verse 33, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Now, seek the kingdom of God, he says, is what you need to do.

He's already made that clear. That he says seek and you will find in this verse, only a few verses later, should at least give us enough reason to investigate whether he might be talking about the same subject here. He's not talking about prayer life in general, perhaps.

But he's talking about seeking the admission into the kingdom of God, seeking to be in the kingdom as opposed to out of it. Now, there seems to be a progression of verbs here, ask, seek, knock. Whenever you come to an area, let's say you're going to visit a friend or you've been invited to stay overnight with somebody and you're on a trip.

Let's say you're going to sleep in a church, you may not be able to relate to that, I sure can. You're traveling through an area, you don't know anyone, but there's a church there that's connected to your church at home or you know someone there or whatever. But you don't know your way around.

You come to town and you ask directions, where is such and such a place? Once you get the directions, you seek it out. You pursue it. You follow the directions and that is how you seek it.

And then when you get there, you knock on the door. And when you knock on the door, you're hoping someone will open the door for you because you want to be admitted. And to ask and to seek and to knock may, not everyone would agree about this, some would just understand this as three synonymous truisms.

Everyone who asks is fine, everyone who seeks is fine, everyone who knocks the door is

helping them. Some just think he's saying the same thing three times in three different ways and that's a possibility. It's also possible he's talking about pursuing and persisting.

Beginning by asking the right questions. Continuing by following the advice or the information you get from those questions and coming right up and knocking to get in to the kingdom of God. Now, in favor of this suggestion, there are a couple of things I'd like to point out and they have to do with Luke's parallels to this passage.

Now, Luke has essentially the parallels of this passage. It would seem in a couple of places, mostly in Luke 11, verses 9 through 13. And then I want to show you something in Luke 13.

Luke 11, verse 9 through 13. Jesus said, So I say to you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from his father among you, from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Now, this is almost identical to the passage as we read it in Matthew 7, with the exception of a couple of things. One, he gives three illustrations instead of two.

Not a stone when he asks for bread, not a serpent when he asks for a fish. He adds a third one, you're not going to give your son a scorpion if he asks for an egg. Now, I don't know if that's particularly relevant.

I will say this, that the reference to a scorpion and the reference to a serpent, at least, has an echo a chapter earlier. I don't know whether it's significant, but in Luke chapter 10, when the 70 came back from their mission, in Luke 10, 19, it says, Behold, I give you authority, Ope, to trample on serpents and scorpions. And over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

This is in the context of their having said to him, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. And when he says all the power of the enemy, including serpents and scorpions, it sounds like he means demons. We know, of course, there's no question that a serpent is a symbol of the devil in other places of scripture, maybe not in every place, but at least in a sufficient number to make the connection.

I don't know that I could say scorpions are an established symbol of Satan, but in the context of them casting out demons and his saying, Hey, I give you, I'm sorry, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions. I don't know that he's talking about literal serpents and scorpions here, but he says, and all the power of the enemy, the



enemy being Satan, I suppose the serpents and scorpions, which are symbolically designated the power of the enemy would be demonic power. Now, when you look at Luke 11, he says, If you ask for one thing, you're not going to get a scorpion or a serpent, but what you're going to get is the Holy Spirit.

He seems to be talking about asking, seeking, knocking to obtain a spiritual life, really, basically. If you pursue God, he's not going to let you end up in some demonic deception. He's going to give you the life he has for you, which is in the Holy Spirit, of course.

That's also a function of being in the kingdom of God. You seek the kingdom and don't be afraid that you're going to end up making a wrong turn and end up in the kingdom of darkness. If you really ask the right questions of Jesus, if you seek the kingdom and his righteousness, if you knock, you'll find that you're at the right door.

You're not going to be asking God for these things and have him misdirect you. Now, this has ramifications a number of ways. One, in terms of guidance.

Most of us would say we have found our way into the kingdom, we're saved, we have the Holy Spirit and all. But one of the things that continues to be vexatious for Christians throughout their entire life, to a lesser or greater degree depending on their temperament and their circumstances, is knowing where God wants me to go next or what he wants me to do next. The general issue of what is guidance, divine guidance.

It says in Romans chapter 8, As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. That's somewhere like verse 15 or 14 or somewhere right in that area in Romans 8. I don't have time to look it up right now. Romans 8, I think it's verse 15, you can correct me if I find it now.

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 14, thank you. This suggests that the Holy Spirit is our guide as well as our life giver.

When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit comes and imparts to us, communicates to us a new life, the divine nature. But then he continues to operate within us to guide us. Those who are the children of God are guided by the Spirit.

Which means that not only when I have sought and found and entered the kingdom of God, but as I am living in this life of the kingdom, it's a life in the Spirit. And I need only to ask. I need only to seek.

I need only to knock. And the Holy Spirit or whatever function of the Holy Spirit I'm needing, guidance or whatever, will be given to me. I will find it.

If I seek it, I will find the right place, the right door. Now, I think that this passage has tremendous ramifications for spiritual guidance in the life of the believer. I don't think

that's the primary meaning Jesus has because I believe he's talking to people who had not quite entered yet.

Even though he's talking to his disciples, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. They didn't have a clue about the upcoming death and resurrection of Christ. The gospel was not at all clear to them.

I mean, they were seeking, they were pursuing, they were following the right guide, they were asking the right questions. And they were knocking at the door and they were going to get in. But they weren't in yet, not in the sense that we can say we are and everyone who has been a Christian has been since the Spirit was given at Pentecost.

So, I think that the primary application of his words is to people who are not yet regenerate but are hungry, are seeking, are asking, are desiring to come in. He says, listen, if that's your disposition, you'll get in. God sees you there.

God sees your heart. He knows your calling. And you're not going to be asking after bread, the bread of life, and get stuck with a rock, you know.

You're not going to be asking for fish or for an egg, which are good things from God and Him allow you to get trapped in a spiritual counterfeit. You're not going to get a scorpion or a serpent. You're going to get the Holy Spirit, not some other spirit.

That's what I understand him to be suggesting. I only say this a bit about guidance secondarily because, as I say, once you've entered the kingdom, you still have the problem, not a major problem perhaps, but a problem at some level of knowing what the Spirit of God would have you do in particular, day by day. And I think that what is true in the general sense of seeking the kingdom in the first place is continues to be true once you're in the kingdom.

You know, I don't think you have fewer privileges or fewer promises after you're in the kingdom than before. God doesn't give fewer privileges to His children than He gave to His enemies. So, I don't know that we should see this necessarily as a promise, you know, ask and it will be given to you about praying for things in general.

Now, there certainly are passages where the Bible encourages us, welcomes us to pray for things that we need. Give us this our daily bread is part of the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. But this sweeping statement that everyone who asks receives.

Everyone who seeks, fine. Everyone who knocks, the door is open to them, is speaking of, in particular, the illustration he gives of the Holy Spirit, asking for the Holy Spirit. Which in this particular instance, I suppose, you know, is referring to the personal Holy Spirit, but I substitute it as the entire complex of ideas of the kingdom of God, life in the Spirit, regeneration, being saved, being born again.

I mean, just the whole thing, the things that we have already found, but He's talking to them about still seeking to obtain. But one thing is very clear. He indicates that the Father doesn't play cruel tricks on people.

And I remember back when I first became aware of the charismatic movement in tongues, and I had not received the gift of tongues. And I wasn't so concerned about this, but I encountered frequently people who were concerned. They were almost afraid to ask God to give them the gift of tongues or even to fill them with the Spirit, lest they might speak in tongues.

And they had heard that there were counterfeit tongues. They had heard that witch doctors speak in tongues and shatter in pieces and so forth. And they knew there were demonic substitutes, and their particular denomination taught that all tongues were in that category.

And therefore, there was almost a fear of seeking everything God might have for them. They were afraid of asking God to fill them with His Spirit. And I remember this verse being the principal assistance to such people.

You know, well, listen, if you're asking, if you're one of His own, if you're seeking Him with your, you know, genuinely, and you're asking Him for something good, for the Holy Spirit whom He's promised, or anything that is truly a function of the Holy Spirit in your life, then you needn't worry that you're going to get a demonic, counterfeit gift of tongues or something like that. Now, of course, if you're not seeking with all your heart, then there's another, that's another issue. You know, it has been pointed out many times that when He says, ask and seek and knock, that it is in the present imperative tense which would suggest, keep asking, keep knocking, keep seeking.

There is the idea of, you know, giving some priority to this. This is something you keep doing. In fact, in this very passage in Luke, this parallel to the passage in Matthew, it is preceded by, if you'll notice, in verses 2 through 4, the Lord's Prayer, which is found in Matthew 6. And then a parable about prayer, which is about the man who comes to his friend at midnight and keeps knocking until he gets what he wants.

That's in verses 5 through 8. And so, following immediately on that parable of persisting and asking for something and getting it, He says, so I say to you, ask or keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. It's interesting, by the way, that I may not be too significant, but seek, ask, excuse me, ask, seek and knock are in the same order in Luke as they are found in Matthew. You might say, well, why is that so surprising? It's not too surprising.

I mean, a lot of things are in the same order in both places. But a lot of things are not. I mean, especially if these were three independent sayings, you know, that were all saying essentially the same thing, then Luke would not have been compelled to put them in the

same order since he doesn't put everything in the same order as Matthew does.

But it may suggest that both Matthew and Luke saw a progression of ideas here. Ask first, then seek, then knock. At least the integrity of that progression seems to be maintained in both places where it is reported.

Now, the other passage in Luke that I thought was relevant to this is in Luke 13. Now, this passage in Luke 13, I don't want to dwell on too long because it actually has a closer parallel later in Matthew 7. That is closer to the end of the Sermon on the Mount than we have already come. But just so you'll see here, Luke 13, 24 begins, Strive to enter through the narrow gate.

Now, of course, we haven't read ahead that far today, but you may be familiar enough with the Sermon on the Mount or Matthew 7 to know that enter the narrow gate is coming up a few verses ahead of where we are. It is there in the Sermon on the Mount. But this is stated a little differently in Luke than in Matthew.

Strive to enter through the narrow gate. For many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open for us.

And he will answer and say to you, I do not know you. Where are you from? Then you will begin to say, we ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets. And he will say, I tell you, I do not know you, where you are from.

Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity. And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, the Gentiles that is, and the north and the south and sit down in the kingdom of God.

And indeed, there are some last, which is the Gentiles in his day, who will be first. And there are some first, that is the Jews, who will be last. By the way, that particular statement about these people coming from all over and sitting in the kingdom, but the children of the kingdom being cast out, has its parallel in the eighth chapter of Matthew, not in the Sermon on the Mount.

But the point I would make here is, while we just read a statement from Jesus, which has its parallel in Luke and in Matthew, and in Luke it is only a couple of chapters before this, that says, if you seek, you will find. If you will knock, the door will be opened. Yet, here we have a case where people are seeking, but they are not allowed to enter.

They are knocking, and standing at the door and knocking in verse 25, and the door does not get opened to them. Now, what is the deal here? Well, it would appear that they waited too long. He says, strive to enter through the narrow gate.

Now, there are a couple of possibilities. One, is that the people he is talking about here, who seek but do not find, who knock and it is not opened to them, either they waited too late. In other words, they now see the judgment come, they had their opportunity, and it is too late now.

They had a chance to make their choice, and they did not make the right choice. It is also possible that he has got a slightly different angle on this, and that is that they are striving to enter, but not in the narrow gate. He says, strive to enter in the narrow gate, for many will try to get in and will not be able to get in, presumably meaning through some other gate, trying to get in some other way.

Now, the narrow gate is Jesus himself. In John chapter 10, he said he was the door to the sheepfold. In John 14, as we know, he said in John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and when it comes to the Father, I mean, Jesus is the access, Jesus is the gate, but many will try to get into the kingdom without using that means.

Now, what means does he suggest here? Well, they argue, we ate in your presence, and you taught in our streets. Now, who are these people then? What particular people are in view in this particular warning that Jesus gives in Luke 13? Well, the Jews of his own day. They heard him speak in their synagogues and in their streets.

They ate in his presence. Some Pharisees even had Jesus over for dinner. These were people who had, you know, contact with Jesus.

They were Jewish people. And it is possible that he is saying, see, there are two possibilities. One is that they are trying to get in on the basis of a casual acquaintance with him, or being Jews, after all, it was to the Jews that he came, he ministered in their streets, he ate among them, the close proximity of them as Jews.

You know, they might be counting on getting in because they are Jews. It is also possible that he is saying, well, when I ate with you, and when you heard me teach, you should have responded then because it is too late. It is not entirely clear why these people are excluded, but certainly there is more than one clear possibility, which would be conditions under which a person might seek and not find, might knock and not have the door open to him.

But the general rule is, if you are seeking with your whole heart, if you seek and keep seeking, seek now and don't stop seeking. Ask now and don't stop asking. Don't wait until it is too late when the gate is shut and then start asking and seeking and knocking.

That is too late then. Do it now and keep doing it. Persevere, abide, continue.

Basically, he is suggesting there has got to be a commitment and a persistence in that commitment. He has suggested in Luke 13 where he says, strive to enter into the narrow gate. It is going to take some effort.

It is going to take some energy. Now, some of you might say, but salvation is not of works. True, it is not.

But it does require a commitment to Jesus Christ and it does require a persistence for that commitment, not falling away, not giving up the faith. That commitment is nothing else but what the Bible calls faith. We are saved by faith, not works.

But faith in the Bible certainly is a commitment, a laying hold and not letting go. If you give up the faith, you haven't persisted. The idea here is ask, keep on asking.

Seek, keep on seeking. Not keep on knocking. You will certainly get every good thing God has for you.

In the case of Luke, he says the Holy Spirit, which suggests that the teaching has particular relevance to seeking something spiritual, seeking God's spiritual best for your life. Particularly, he said earlier in Matthew 6, he said, seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. So I would suggest, though I can't be dogmatic on this, that Matthew 7, ask, seek, knock, has particular relevance to praying for entry to the kingdom of God, praying for the spiritual thing that God would have for you, praying for the Holy Spirit, His guidance or whatever, His gifts and His presence.

Those are the things specified. And it's not generally saying that anything you ask for, any carnal thing, any material thing, you can necessarily count on it. It's not like you have carte blanche there.

Matt, did you want to say something about that? Well, that's a possibility. When it was open to the masses, they didn't choose. But when the little gates all just left, there were too many trying to get in.

I mean, that might be the imagery there. Don't wait. Strive now to be in the first in your block to enter the kingdom of God.

Yeah, that's a possible understanding. We'll encounter essentially the same teaching, slightly different words a little later in Matthew 7 actually. But before he goes into it, we have verse 12, Matthew 7, 12.

It says, Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. Now, immediately after that, he says, enter by the narrow gate. Now, you'll recall that verse 12 here in Matthew 7 is what we usually call the golden rule.

I made some comment about it yesterday, partly because the opening verses of Matthew 7 are an application of it. Judge the way you would want to be judged. Or as Luke 6 expands on it, judge not and you won't be judged.

Condemn not and you'll not be condemned. Forgive and you'll be forgiven. Give and it'll

be given to you.

In other words, do the thing to others that you would like to have done to you. And so there was occasion to bring up verse 12 as the general principle, though I would say we have occasion to bring up verse 12 in almost any context in the Bible because it is all the law and all the prophets, Jesus says. Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for that is the law and the prophets.

Again, I don't want to go over too much ground. I went over it yesterday. I commented yesterday that Jesus made the very same statement about love your neighbors yourself.

And so does Paul in Romans 13, basically listing some of the laws and saying, well, basically what this law is down to is love your neighbors yourself. In Romans 13, it says, he that loves his neighbor does him no harm. He that loves does no injury to his neighbor.

Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. Well, it's obvious that this is another way of saying the same thing. But what this does is make love a practical matter.

It's doing something. It's not just feeling good vibes towards someone. It's not just being attracted to someone or having affection towards someone.

It's not loving those who love you. And it's not even loving those who don't love you in some abstract way. It's what you do to them.

When you read, love your neighbor as you love yourself, because sometimes love is interpreted in terms of a positive feeling only. A person might say, well, I love everybody. I love my neighbor the way I love myself.

But you see, the real test of love is what you do to them. Whatever you want people to do to you is what you should do to them. And that's what love really amounts to, is doing something.

I'm not saying it doesn't start with a positive feeling, but it isn't a dominant trait in your life if it doesn't motivate you to action. Paul said in Galatians 5, 6, in Christ it's not circumcision or uncircumcision that matters anything. It's faith that works through love.

And love causes you to do things. And so Jesus is just saying the greatest commandment, or the second greatest commandment, or the one that's connected with the greatest commandment, in other words here. We call it the golden rule usually when it's in this form, though it really is just a restatement of the love of your neighbor as yourself commandment.

Now, this does have precursors. This statement of Jesus has precursors in earlier Jewish literature and even some pagan literature. Confucius said something like, whatever you

would hate to have done to you, don't do that to anyone else.

A number of old Jewish writings, the book of Tobit, and a few other non-biblical Jewish writings that are known from prior to Jesus' time, have statements like, whatever you hate, don't do that to someone else. But see, all the instances where someone before Jesus said it, they always said it in the negative. Don't do to someone what you don't want them doing to you.

Presumably, if you just mind your own business and lived as a hermit, you could obey that thing. You don't end up doing anything to anyone. You just don't do bad things to people because you don't want people doing bad things to you.

You don't end up in coldness and apathy toward the misery of others just because you're not inflicting any on them. But Jesus says, what you want people positively to do to you. If you're hitchhiking, you want someone to pick you up.

If you're hungry, you'd want a rich person to help you out a little bit, give you some food or something. What you would want positively done to you is what you should positively do to others. It's not just a matter of staying out of trouble and avoiding hurting and injuring other people.

It's everything that you would hope someone would do for you if you were in their circumstances. So, this is how it is developed for us in both James and in 1 John. Passages which I don't know to what degree you're already familiar with them.

They're very familiar to me and I don't know whether they are to you. So, I'll go ahead and look at them with you. In James, chapter 2, where he's talking about faith and work, in verse 14, he says, What does it profit my brother if someone says he has faith and does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled.

But you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Now, notice, if someone is naked or hungry, lacking in essential things for life, if you just say, what some of the previous teachers had said that were similar to what Jesus said, you know, you didn't do anything harmful to them, you haven't done something to them that you'd hate to have done to you, you've done absolutely nothing in fact to them. But faith would motivate you to do something positive.

What would you wish to have done to you if you were naked and destitute of daily food? Obviously, you'd wish that people who had the power to do so would give you some form of assistance. And therefore, that's what you should do. And if you don't do that kind of thing, he says, well, you know, that doesn't profit anything.

That's faith without works. We have a similar statement, this time not talking about faith



but love, in 1 John 3, 1 John chapter 3, verse 16 says, By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brethren in need and shuts up his heart from it, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue but in action.

So again, the idea is that faith and love, the two cardinal things of importance in the Christian life, both have their manifestation in practical good deeds to people who are in crisis or in need, whether it's lack of food, whether it's people who are, you know, I don't know, in any set of circumstances, but you would, if you found yourself in them, there'd be some specific thing that you'd appreciate someone doing to you, Jesus says, well, do that to them. If you are incapable of helping everybody, then there are some priorities the Bible would recommend, you know. I mean, I feel that, I feel a Christian should be willing to help an unbeliever.

But if a person was, for instance, confronted by an unbeliever who was homeless but also knew of a Christian who was homeless, that he would be, you know, somewhat obligated by Galatians chapter 6 to give preference to the believer. Galatians 6.10 says, therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially those who are of the household of faith. So the especially part seems to state a priority or a hierarchy of priorities in this matter.

So, you know, here's the thing. If the electric company asks us to make a donation, they do actually ask us to make a donation to help poor families who lack electricity, I would prefer not to make that donation but rather go to a church and say, do any of your members lack electricity? I can't provide electricity for every poor person who's out there. There's too many of them.

But I would certainly be glad to do it for somebody who has a brother who couldn't pay his electric bills. You know, if I could, if I have it. It really, I guess that prioritizing is what makes many Christians, myself included, sort of against the social programs of the state.

In general, any kind of relief programs is not so much that we oppose people being relieved, but the problem is that they're relieved at the taxpayer's expense. And if the taxpayer was left with his own money to do with what he wanted, then Christians could relieve such people as was the priority to relieve.