



## FOCUS VERSE

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### Matthew 7:12

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

## LESSON TEXT

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### Matthew 7:7-12

7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

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God has always insisted we should treat others justly.



## CULTURE CONNECTION

### It Still Happens

Recently our neighbor across the street donated a kidney to a coworker who, it was hoped, would have at least another year to live.

A stranger paid a parking ticket for a young mother whose nine-week-old baby had spent days in the hospital. The unknown donor left a note on the car: “I saw your car had a parking ticket on it. I’m sure whatever you are going through at the hospital is tough enough so I paid for you.”

In a world that seems increasingly cold and indifferent to the needs of people, it is refreshing to know there are still those who

will step up and help. It still happens. There are still those who think beyond themselves. There are still those who will take time from their busy schedules and who will reach into their wallets or purses to lend a hand. There are still individuals today who will reach down for the fallen and help them stand to their feet.

If we are waiting for the perfect moment, if we are waiting to be sure that a person is worthy of our help, what you and I need to do may never happen. We may never act out of compassion and concern. We may never fulfill the Golden Rule.

### OUTLINE

#### I. GOD’S PROVISION

- A. God Is a Faithful Provider
- B. God Does Not Give Us Harmful Things

#### II. GOD’S CHARACTER NEVER CHANGES

- A. Much of the Sermon on the Mount Contrasts the New Covenant with the Old
- B. The Principle of How We Are to Treat Others Has Been Consistent

#### III. OUR REFLECTION OF GOD’S NATURE

- A. Our Motive Should Not Be to Receive Earthly Rewards
- B. Our Motive Should Be to Follow Jesus’ Example

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Something about the teaching of Jesus Christ captivated His audiences. His listeners were not forced to listen to His discourses. The words Christ spoke, however, were compelling, commanding, and heart-searching. Instead of burdening His followers with the restrictive regulations of the rabbinical law,

He spoke to them of their heavenly Father’s love and of His abundant provisions.

Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, our Lord laid no heavy yoke upon the necks of the people (Matthew 11:30). God’s servants were not to live in a state of perpetual anxiety or paralyzing fear. At the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, the people of Israel were astonished at His doctrine because “he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29).

Christ’s words spoke of things the common Israelite could easily understand—the fowls of the air, the lilies and grass of the field, and a house built upon a rock. He used the ordinary to explain the profound, the things that are seen to illustrate the things that are unseen. Priests and prophets had spoken boldly in the past of heavenly principles, but none with such clarity or with such conviction. This man from Galilee penetrated the souls of those who would listen, and no one, neither friend nor foe, seemed quite the same after hearing the words of the Master.

Jesus Christ taught His followers more than what to believe; He taught them how to respond to God’s precepts and how they should live on a daily basis before their neighbors. And Christ taught with compassion. No

one has ever shown a greater appreciation for the circumstances under which we live and the trials that we must endure. No one has been more deeply touched by our everyday needs. No one has spoken with such insight and assurance of God's everlasting care.

In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord set out some remarkably high ideals for His disciples to follow. They were to take the humble path, the way of loving service to God and to their fellow human beings. They were to trust God in their most difficult situations, and they were to live to be a blessing to others. Though much of what the Master taught was concise, His words at the same time were powerful and had sweeping implications. In summary of all the Law and the prophets required, Jesus gave what has become known as the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12).

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. GOD'S PROVISION

What invaluable lessons can be learned from the examples of God providing for His people in the Bible! In times of national peril, in times of famine, in times of war, and even in times of apostasy, the Lord proved He was incredibly willing and sufficiently able to care for those who would call upon His name.

Consider the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness. Every day was to become a miracle of provision under the careful guidance of Jehovah. It has been estimated it would take forty-five hundred tons of manna to feed the children of Israel on a daily basis. But remarkably this provision was not to be for a matter of days, weeks, or even months; God's people were filled to the full for forty years.

### A. God Is a Faithful Provider

Wonderful promises are found in Matthew 7:7. Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." These statements are powerful enough to uplift those who may be discouraged or destitute. They are open invitations broad enough to meet every need. Everyone can embrace these provisions. The sinner who repents and asks for forgiveness

can find assurance in these promises. The seeker who needs the baptism of the Holy Ghost can be filled. There is hope for the suffering and for the sick, for the broken and for the bereaved. The unemployed and the underprivileged can be encouraged. The backslider can be reclaimed. The chemically dependent can be delivered and set free.

What breathtaking things could be accomplished, what marvelous answers to prayer would take place if God's people would simply take a firm hold upon these promises! By using the present imperative forms for "ask," "seek," and "knock," Jesus was directing His disciples to make their requests to God with unyielding persistence and with unwavering faith. The *New Living Translation* renders Matthew 7:7 as follows: "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." By implication we are to pray continually and with fervency, much as Elijah prayed that it might not rain, and then after three and one-half years, that it would (James 5:17-18).

The thought of seeking and knocking, in conjunction with asking, seems to suggest we must act on our faith. We must put legs under our prayers, so to speak. Peter requested of the Lord that he might walk on the water, but the disciple had to take the first step. Despite the difficulty of doing so, the man with the withered hand had to stretch out that misshapen hand before he was healed. The man born blind washed in the pool of Siloam and only then "came seeing" (John 9:7).

No one needs to feel excluded or beyond the help of almighty God. "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:8). The Lord has obligated Himself to those who come into His throne room with a humble and obedient attitude. The proper approach means everything, "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

### B. God Does Not Give Us Harmful Things

*We may not get what we want.* A marvelous story, sometimes called the story of the

Emmaus Road, is told in Luke 24:13–35. Two of Christ’s disciples had left Jerusalem after the crucifixion. We know the name of only one—Cleopas—but it seems these two were simply among the rank and file of the Lord’s followers. They were like many believers today who are just common people, without any great distinction. Although there is much we do not know about these two travelers, we do know they were terribly disillusioned and disappointed with everything that had happened. The grim reality of Christ’s death had crushed their hearts as well as their hopes. It would take Jesus Himself, traveling with them to Emmaus, to explain to Cleopas and his friend the greater purpose behind all that had taken place.

Sometimes we do not get what we want even though we feel our motives were pure and we prayed in faith. When Paul prayed three times for deliverance from his thorn in the flesh, the Lord did not give him what he asked for. Rather the Lord gave Paul something far better—grace. God is still sovereign. He will never mislead His people, never give them things that would hurt or harm them, never allow them to be tempted above what they can bear. In our humanity we “see through a glass, darkly” (I Corinthians 13:12). But our Father “knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matthew 6:8).

*We will get what we need.* It is simply a matter of trust. Jesus reasoned that even a natural father will not give his son a stone for bread or a serpent for a fish. Surely we can place our confidence in our heavenly Father’s provisions. Psalm 84:11 states, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

God is infinitely wiser and kinder than any earthly parent could possibly be. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:11). In a similar passage in Luke 11:13, the Lord referred to “the Holy Spirit” instead of “good things.”

Our Father is concerned not only with our food, our clothing, and our bodies; He

is vitally concerned with our spiritual and eternal welfare. Following His resurrection, Christ’s instructions made it clear the disciples were not to go out from Jerusalem to preach the gospel until they were “endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). In Ephesus, Paul questioned the followers of John the Baptist: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2). Each one of us should long to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

God will empower new converts who are struggling spiritually to get their footing. As He assured Israel, “I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10). God has promised the more mature Christian, weary and perhaps wounded in the struggle against the enemy, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

*“My God shall supply  
all your need according  
to his riches in  
glory by Christ Jesus”  
(Philippians 4:19).*

Our weather and our seasons change. Our governments and the laws of our land change. Our friends and our family relationships change. Our health and our personal finances change. But there is One who remains a constant friend, no matter what our circumstances may be. He will always be the same: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8). We can depend on the Lord to meet our needs. We gain strength, encouragement, and direction for our lives through union with Him. With unmatched courage and conviction, Paul wrote to his friends from a Roman prison: “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

## II. GOD'S CHARACTER NEVER CHANGES

### A. Much of the Sermon on the Mount Contrasts the New Covenant with the Old

There were radical differences between the highly legalistic views of the Jewish religionists and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The scribes and Pharisees had used the Law, along with their added rules and regulations, to beat the Jewish people into submission. These religious leaders followed Jesus from place to place not because they approved of His message, but because they wanted to entrap Him in His words. While they themselves claimed to uphold the Law, they frequently looked for loopholes to break it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned against this type of hypocrisy. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

There were glaring contrasts between what was traditionally taught regarding the old covenant and Christ's revelation of the New Covenant. In the Sermon on the Mount, not only did Jesus correct the misinterpretations and abuses that had arisen, but He also taught a higher set of values. The Lord would say, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time. . . . But I say unto you . . ." (Matthew 5:21–22; 27–28). The old covenant condemned murder; Christ went on to condemn unjustified anger. The Law prohibited adultery; in addition, the Lord prohibited lust. There had been a liberal attitude regarding divorce, but Jesus said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery" (Matthew 5:32). What Christ taught did not abrogate the old covenant; it surpassed it and gave it richer meaning (Matthew 5:17).

### B. The Principle of How We Are to Treat Others Has Been Consistent

While discussing Kingdom principles in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus covered a range of topics and quickly moved from one important issue to another. But He was consistent in His teaching about how we are to

treat others. Always the Lord instructed that we are to treat fellow humans as friends and not as enemies. Always we are to love them, forgive them, bless them, pray for them, and do them good.

There are no higher standards of ethics than what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. While many people live selfishly in the miserable depths of sin and shame, Christ's sermon presented a series of ideals that, if followed, can lift men and women to new heights. To conclude Matthew 7:1–11, Jesus presented what is often referred to as the Golden Rule: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

What does this statement mean? Obviously we are to conduct ourselves toward others in the same way we would want individuals to treat us. This requires a deep sensitivity to those around us. The Golden Rule goes far beyond simply feeling empathy for our neighbors; it demands that we put our feelings into action to make life easier for them. It may mean offering to babysit our neighbors' children while the husband takes his wife to the hospital. Perhaps this principle will cause us to provide food for a hungry person. It will surely mean that we take a gracious attitude toward someone who asks for our forgiveness. Certainly it will cause us to be less critical and more encouraging to a fellow Christian who has stumbled and fallen.

It is important to remember that although the Sermon on the Mount presents a higher ethical life, its teachings do not bring salvation. We must be born again. We need the sacrificial atonement provided for by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## III. OUR REFLECTION OF GOD'S NATURE

We who are believers are to reflect the nature of God. While on earth Jesus perfectly exhibited his Father's character and ideals. The Son of God emphatically told Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:9). Further, immediately after showing mercy to an adulterous woman, Christ taught the people, "I am the light of the world"

(John 8:12). Now, however, in His physical absence, we who are Christians are to be the lights that shine in this darkened world (Matthew 5:14). Our lives are to be vivid reflections of Christ's love and grace to all mankind. "Let your light so shine before men," Jesus encouraged His disciples, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

### **A. Our Motive Should Not Be to Receive Earthly Rewards**

Those whose lives we touch are often filled with gratitude. They frequently respond to the kindnesses shown to them by opening up their hearts as well as their homes. Because a single mother, a senior widower, or an insecure teenager feels he or she has finally found someone who genuinely cares, that individual may want to reciprocate with money or gifts.

*"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).*

Still it is not a matter of what we receive from others that should motivate our actions. If we are Spirit-filled, we will long to share God's love regardless of any earthly reward.

To illustrate how we should act toward those who are less fortunate, Jesus told the story of the Samaritan who ministered to a wounded traveler on the road to Jericho. (See Luke 10:30–35.) From a natural viewpoint, the Samaritan gained nothing from showing kindness to the fallen man. The Samaritan risked his life to help the stranger while putting his own plans on hold. Attending to the victim's wounds, the Samaritan poured in oil

and wine before bandaging them. Then He set the injured man on his own animal, took him to an inn, spent the night, and paid the innkeeper to care for the man. In addition, the Samaritan promised to return and pay the innkeeper for any additional expenses the innkeeper incurred during the man's recovery. Nothing in the story suggested the injured man ever saw his benefactor again, and there is no mention of any kind of reward.

### **B. Our Motive Should Be to Follow Jesus' Example**

Perhaps the greatest test of a believer's walk with God is being mistreated by others. We generally get along well with those who respect us and are friendly toward us. But what about those who are intentionally rude and those who are cruel? The fact is that being maligned and mistreated can be an opportunity to let our light shine brightly before men. Jesus set the standard, and there can be no higher. He was a prince among men who treated Him like a villain. He was the Savior of the world treated like a despot.

On the darkest of days, on a Roman cross surrounded by a jeering mob, Jesus' love for mankind was displayed for all who would see. He had been falsely accused, spat upon, beaten severely, and nailed to a cross. His friends had forsaken Him; His enemies had mocked Him, saying, "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (Mark 15:31). The physical pain must have been horrific; the distress of soul must have been overwhelming. But what were His words for those who despised Him and delighted in His anguish? Were they words of condemnation or vindictiveness? No. Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This was an astounding statement coming from the Lord of glory—an unselfish call for forgiveness for His tormentors rather than a call for twelve legions of angels to destroy them.

His love for others motivated Christ while on earth. Despite His own weariness, He always had time to care for the downtrodden. Jesus would minister to the multitudes until He was exhausted. No one who came to the Lord was turned away. A blind beggar's cry would stop Him in His tracks; a woman taken

in adultery would receive forgiveness. He took time to go to dinner with a hated publican and on another occasion with a haughty Pharisee. He answered His critics, not just to prove His points, but to show them a better way. Heartfelt compassion caused Him to go to the home of Jairus, and despite the ridicule of the mourners, to raise the ruler's daughter from the dead. Compassion caused Him go through Samaria and minister to a woman who had lived a life of shame. This was the way Jesus lived day by day.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

An individual who has been visited and encouraged by someone while hospitalized will remember that experience and would be an excellent candidate to do the same for someone else. Someone who has received a compliment while going through a personal battle would be well qualified to do the same for someone else who is struggling. A person who has received a note of appreciation for a job well done would be able to do the same for another.

Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Our Lord set the precedent for us to follow. A thankful heart, a heart grateful for God's goodness, will always find ways to

bleed others. At times our acts of kindness may seem to go unnoticed or even be unappreciated, but the Lord never forgets them.

Jesus promised that at the judgment, when He comes with His holy angels, there will be a glorious kingdom provided for those who had fed Him when He was hungry, provided drink for Him when He was thirsty, clothed Him when He was naked, and visited Him when He was sick and in prison. Though believers may question when they did these things for the Lord, He will give them this explanation: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). We will reap eternal benefits for showing even the smallest kindness to a servant of Christ. "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mark 9:41).

We can be bearers of hope. We have the privilege of relieving the pain and the suffering of others. We can help to carry the burden of another who is traveling on life's weary road. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). ■

## REFLECTIONS

- Why is it important to pray with intensity when seeking answers to prayer?
- What assurance do we have that God will never give us harmful things?
- Discuss the fact that there are times to simply trust our Father for what is best, regardless of our feelings.
  - Explain ways Christ's message in the Sermon on the Mount surpasses the Mosaic law.
  - How did Jesus set the example for the way we should treat others?
  - Following the Golden Rule is certainly a departure from the way in which people often treat each other today. Discuss why following the Golden Rule is still the way God wants us to live.