

We’re nearly done with our study of the Sermon on the Mount. But the Lord’s instruction is just as strong now as it was in the beginning. He commanded his disciples, **“treat people the same way you want them to treat you.”** This morning we’re going to talk about what this command has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

## OPENING PRAYER

### MATTHEW 7:7-12

**“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”** <sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup> Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? <sup>11</sup> 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 what is good to those who ask Him! <sup>12</sup> **In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”**

These are probably Jesus’ most famous words: **“treat people the same way you want them to treat you.”** The Golden Rule: We want to be respected, therefore we show everyone else respect. We crave unconditional acceptance, therefore we accept everyone else as they are without expectations. We want to be encouraged in our work and families, therefore we encourage everyone we know in our homes and in our workplaces. Wouldn’t it be great if we could do this?

**“treat people the same way you want them to treat you”**: Such a simple idea, but so hard to do. But Jesus did say in the preceding passage, **“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 what is good to those who ask Him!”**

It's tempting to laugh at that accusation, as in, "Well, I'm not THAT bad." But evil doesn't have to be Satan worship! Rather, evil is anything we do which is contrary to the will of God which sets back the mission he called us to, to bring the Good News of his grace to the world.

We do scheme, and lie, and cheat, don't we. We do sabotage one another's work and we tell stories about each other. That's what Jesus meant when he said we're "evil."

But we can change. The Lord did not give us this command to **"treat people the same way you want them to treat you"** to drive us to despair. But he wanted us to realize how really powerful the hand of God is in our lives if we will only call on his name.

Did you notice how Jesus began this teaching about the Golden Rule with instruction about prayer. He said, **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."**

I bet you have never brought these two teachings together, what Jesus said about how God answers prayers and his command to treat people in the same way we want them to treat us. But look at the passage again. The Lord gave us the promise of answered-prayer, and then he chided us for being faithless, for being "evil," and then he told us to fulfill the Golden Rule, saying **"THEREFORE, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."**

Here's a Bible study tip: Whenever you read the word, **"therefore"** in your Bible, ask yourself, "What is the **"therefore"** there for? The **"therefore"** is there for us to understand that because God loves you and me so very much, he has given us everything we need in order to fulfill the Golden Rule. He has promised to answer our prayers.

“Amen. The end”: That’s what I would say if this was easy. But respecting people who are obnoxious and proud is a pretty tall order. Loving people who do not love me back, doesn’t seem rational. Accepting people who don’t measure up to my expectations is asking too much.

But consider Jesus. He loved, respected, and accepted everyone who came to him, even Pontius Pilate, the man who condemned him to the Cross.

So we have that, the example of Jesus, and I remember the song,

**On a hill far away, stood an old rugged Cross  
The emblem of suff'ring and shame  
And I love that old Cross where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain**

So, my brothers and sisters, with contriteness of heart we repent for our evil. And we pray. That’s why Jesus gave us these promises to answer our prayers. He was saying, I want you to treat each other as I treated you, and you’re going to be able to do this because you’re going to pray about it, and God is going to answer your prayers, and you will be strengthened to do exactly as I have commanded you.

Jesus said, **“Ask, and it will be given to you.”** He did not say this because he wanted to give us more stuff. Jesus doesn’t do stuff. But Jesus transforms hearts. Jesus said, **“Ask, and it will be given to you”** so that we would ask God for the power to love our neighbor the way we love ourselves.

When Jesus said, **“seek, and you will find,”** he was not saying he wanted to give you a great parking spot at the mall! Rather, Jesus said **“seek, and you will find”** so that we would plumb the depths of our own hearts and ask God to help us to respect one another as fellow strugglers in this thing called life.

When Jesus said, **“knock, and it will be opened to you”** he was not pretending to be Monty Hall, as if we were literally knocking on a door of prizes from God. God does not care about such things. But Jesus commanded us, **“knock, and it will be opened to you”** so that we would have absolute confidence to come before the throne of God, and that before this throne with humble hearts, hearts repentant for all the evil, sad, and nasty things we have done to each other, we would ask him to help us to accept one another with the same affection with which he accepted us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we should ask, seek, and knock that the Lord would provide everything we need to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

This week let us receive God’s love and forgiveness for our sins with a sense of thankfulness and joy.

This week let us accept God’s promise to answer our prayers at face value, and let us pray that he would strengthen us to love, accept, and respect one another just as we desire to be loved, accepted, and respected.

And this week let us find opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.