

Series: START STOPPING

Sunday May 24, 2020
STOP PUSHING AND START ASKING!
Matthew 7:7-11
Speaker: Ken Davis

1. Last summer, I heard a talk by Chris Voss who, for years, was the top FBI negotiator in dealing with terrorists. He lays out his strategy in a book entitled, **Never Split The Difference**. Interestingly enough, one of the key topics of interest in his talk was parents negotiating bedtime with their kids!

-We are **born** with the ability to argue, to bribe, to make deals to get what we want. Every year large corporations spend a **lot** of money sending their representatives to Washington and Ottawa to have legislation go in their favor. Most people who seriously gamble have special techniques to get **Lady Luck** on their side. There are **feng shui** specialists who charge builders and developers a **lot** of money to help good luck and good health come into homes and work places and **stay** there!

a. Actually, all through history people have worked to **bribe** or **negotiate** with Gods or the forces that be to get health and prosperity for themselves. In North America where we see ourselves as the captain of our own ship and master of our future, we work hard to get what we want through aggressive behavior. You've seen it, right? **"I will work harder, work behind the scenes, say what I need to say, do what I need to do to bring good things to my life! You'd better just get out of the way!"**

-The foundation for this kind of thinking and acting is this: **I am responsible for getting everything I want and need in life and I will do what I have to do to make that happen!**

-According to Jesus—this philosophy is dead wrong because it leads to pride, greed and selfishness. And that's only the beginning of the problems it creates. Here's what I'm saying, we humans are **always** bargaining, negotiating, influencing, networking—**trying** to get a better deal.

b. **Jesus** says that we don't need to force, bargain, whine, coerce, force, or do magic to have good things happen in life. He says, **"Just ASK!"**

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. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. (Matthew 7:7-11 NLT)
2. So...**why wouldn't we just ask?** Well, cause it's humbling. We'd rather just get what we need for ourselves—so God has to share the credit with us! We'd rather coerce, force,

negotiate, bargain, and bribe—cause asking a Heavenly Father feels both helpless—**and** humbling. Like we're just little kids. Asking implies, well, that we need permission!

-What you find as you read the Bible and other ancient sources is that negotiating with the gods or the forces “out there” has been a practice from earliest times. Faith in God—as in **just talking with Him**—has always been challenged by attempts to get the attention of the ‘gods’ or the ‘forces’ through manipulation. Magic. Good luck.

-There's an ancient narrative in the Bible that illustrates this perfectly. Israel had gotten so corrupt that God had said they would not have any rain until his prophet, Elijah, said so. You may have heard of the king and queen running the country at that time—Ahab and Jezebel. They were kinda the **Bonnie and Clyde** of Israel—except they were **running** the country. It was **so** bad that Elijah was living in self-imposed isolation—something you may have heard of.

a. Eventually, Elijah challenges **their** gods—Baal and Ashtoreth to a power encounter with Israel's God—with the agreement that whoever came out on top would be **God**. The power encounter on Mount Carmel involved two bulls on two altars. The prophets of Baal would call on him—and see if he answered with fire. Then Elijah would call on Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel. Whoever answered was the true God.

-So, they started in the morning, yelling, “O Baal, hear us!!” And they worked **very** hard to coerce him into doing something. No answer. Then they ramped it up a notch.

So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response. (1 Kings 18:28-29 NLT)

-So then Elijah says, “Watch this!” He prays very simply:

O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself. (1 Kings 18:27 NLT)

-And then, **BAM!** God lit that baby up! Fire consumed the sacrifice, the water that had been poured all over it—and even the altar itself.

b. So, what's my point here? Well, the first one isn't very popular. It's the fact that ever since the beginning of time there have been other **gods—little ‘g’** that people have served. For example, there are a lot of people who, if pressed, would say that they worship the **One True God**. If they get in trouble, they call out to Him—and they may even go to visit Him at Christmas and Easter—but that's pretty much it.

-Their devotion, their time, their energy, their trust—their **worth-ship**—what they believe is of **ultimate worth**—is **mammon**—what Jesus calls the god of money and stuff. Or **health**. Think about how much time and money and energy people spend on their money and stuff—and their health.

*Maybe it's not health—maybe it's **appearance**. People who are financially conservative will sometimes pull out **all** the stops when it comes to their hair, skin,

nails, and clothes—whatever it takes to keep your shoulders broad, your legs slim and your tummy flat.

*Sometimes it's sports or sports entertainment—or parents trying to turn their kids into the next sports or music star. There are **lots** of 'little g' gods out there; **friends** and **getting known and followed, success**, our kids the right grades from the right universities so they can...**get ahead!** What does it mean to **get ahead?** Well, **finish first—in FRONT of the other kids—and gain the approval of MAMMON**—the god of money and stuff--which has almost **nothing** to with their souls.

- c. None of these things are wrong. Not at all. What's **wrong** is when we are more devoted to them than we are to God and anything that has to do with knowing, loving and serving him. See, our grave marker has two dates with a dash in between—and then **eternity** after the last date, whatever it is.
- d. Not only do the ancient Scriptures that record Elijah's struggle with little 'g' gods warn us about getting of the powerlessness of these gods, Jesus clearly judges them and, at the end of this specific talk, warns us that getting more, getting ahead, being sought out—depending on magic, good luck, grabbing and coercion is a **foundation of sand!** And when the storms come—especially the final one called **death?** It **all** collapses.

-What **God** wants—and responds to—is a relationship. Bribing, nagging, and attempts to get **good luck** are, to be honest, worthless. And the Old Testament is the clear record of that. In fact, when God extricated Israel from Egypt, His judgments were focused on the **little 'g'** gods the Egyptians depended on, lived for, and died for. And that message has **never** changed.

- e. Now, do you mind if I kinda create a parallel between the little 'g' gods back then—and the little 'g' gods in our culture?

-First, let me say at the front end. I don't for a moment believe that God sent **Covid-19** to the world to teach us all a lesson. You know, "Okay all you proud, arrogant little people! You think you're in control? **Take that!** We live in a fallen, broken world—and it was broken when Adam and Eve chose to rebel. There are **very** natural causes—and I don't believe in any of the conspiracy theories.

-On the **other** hand, think about how the things we depend on—sometimes give our **worth-ship** to have failed. How about the economy? I mean, how's **mammon** doing these days? How about entertainment, sports, adrenaline vacations, movies, music? How many of you think education, science and the medical community is going to save us? They're totally overwhelmed. How about beauty, the clothing market? It's all been taken down by a tiny strand of virus.

-See, the point of **little 'g' gods** is they're supposed to save you, bring good luck, keep stuff like this from happening? At the **very** least, this is clearly a wake-up call; **Who can save and help—and who can't!** Not only can these **little 'g' gods** not be tricked or coerced into helping us—what you get in return is **SILENCE!** Being **saved** by this stuff is like trying to fly your car to Paris: **It can't get you there!**

3. And *that's* why Jesus would take the time and space in *His most important message to us and to the world* to say: **Talk to Someone who can actually HELP you!**

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. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8 NLT)

-What Jesus says here is amazing. That Someone—the *Father*—immense, with limitless power and resources actually *knows* you, *loves* you and *cares* about you! So...If you *want* something, *keep on asking* for it—and you'll *receive what you ask for!* Some with seeking and knocking. You'll *find!* Doors will be *opened – GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN! So...why don't we?*

- a. I think sometimes it's because when we *put into words* what we really want—it sounds kinda selfish and narcissistic. "God, make my children the shining stars of the class—and let them grow up to be astounding rich, successful, and smart—so *they make ME look good!*

-Or, "God what I *really* want you to do for me is make me slim, great-looking, with luxurious hair, smooth skin—so *everyone* will either desire me or envy me! Or, make me the Grand Poobah of the universe—or at least Toronto. The winner of every argument—and then make me and all family members wealthy, healthy and wise!"

-To ask *God* raises the whole issue of alignment? As in, "How many other people are asking for the same thing—and *What does God want?*" According to Jesus, God's desires are *not* about us getting all we want—they're relational—loving God and loving others. To pray, "God, bless me and my wife—and my son John and his wife—*us four, no more...Amen!*" is a little narrow, right?

-To align with God and His will—means understanding that He cares about us and wants the best for us *now* AND for eternity. Cooperating with that *might* mean that He is a good parent and won't destroy our lives by spoiling us rotten. And we *want* to be spoiled rotten! Our thought is, "I don't *want* to think character or eternity—I *want it...and I want it NOW!*

- b. When you get into the whole complicated mess of what *others* are asking for and what *they* want for their kids—it seems easier to just *grab* what we want before anyone *else* gets it. Or...to try to bribe God to listen to *you* instead of others.
- c. And *asking* can devolve into *magic* or *manipulation*. Historically, this got into the bizarre and the cruel. The prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel are the tip of the iceberg. Read the history of most religions and you'll find people who don't just cut themselves, they force young girls into temple prostitution and burn their children to death. *Maybe if I impress God with my devotion and sacrifice, I'll get what I want!*

-Some of you may remember the book, *The Secret*. It involves sincerely and firmly asking the *universe* for what you need, *believing with all your heart that you'll get*

it, and then just getting it! You want to ask, “So, does **the universe** have a personality—and have the power to do that? **How does that work?**”

- d. Sometimes this stuff happens with Christians. You’ve seen it; some faith evangelist telling you that if you send them money, they’ll send you a prayer cloth, or special cleansing water that will magically bring good things to your life! If you **don’t** get what you want, they say, “Well, **you just didn’t have enough faith!** I remember an old elder in one of our churches saying, “If you ask for healing—and then doubt, you can **lose your healing!**”

-And **Jesus** addresses issue of manipulation when it comes to prayer. He says:

“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! (Matthew 6:7-8 NLT)

So, **just to be clear**—it’s not about how loud you pray, how long you pray, whether your on you face or sitting on the couch—or how well you pray—or how many Bible verses you quote; prayer is a **little kid asking Dad for help!**

4. And that brings us to the second major barrier to just **asking, seeking and knocking**. It’s our pride. Asking, in some respects, puts us on the level of a child. And that’s precisely where Jesus places us. He says:

You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! (Matthew 7:9-10 NLT)

-See, we like to think of ourselves as sophisticated adults who know what we want, chase it down and tackle it—not little kids who have to **ask** to do pretty much anything. The thought of coming to a **Heavenly Dad** and asking, “Dad—**what do you think? Should I, or shouldn’t I? Do you like the car? Is it too extravagant? What about the house—would you give me permission to buy it and fix it up?**

-And **that is precisely the problem!** See, **we** want to be great--do great things, make great strides, accomplish great things and be seen as great people—which leads in the opposite direction Jesus said to travel:

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, “I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 18:1-4 NLT)

- a. Coming to God like a child—no matter how old we are, no matter what we’re the president of, no matter how much we earn or how many degrees we have—is **entry level stuff—literally!** In case you didn’t pick up on it, Jesus is saying that to **even be a part** of his Kingdom—that is, to live under his rule and leadership and grace—we need to turn from our sins and become like little children.

-Years ago, I heard a kids musical called the *Upside Down Kingdom*. I'll never forget the words to one of the songs: **It's the upside-down Kingdom—if you wanna go up, you gotta go down.**

- b. The **strange** thing is that in Jesus day, kids were 2nd class citizens—seen, but not heard—so this was **very** new to everyone listening to Him. Jesus totally flipped the org chart. In fact, his most consistent metaphor for our relationship with God—was that of little children totally dependent on the love and care of a Father.

-So, let me put **Jesus'** question into **my** words: **Will your pride ALLOW you to understand WHO God is AND who you are?** That He is infinite in every sense and **we** are finite in every sense. He **respects** us, but the concept of having an eye-to-eye, man-to-man talk with Him is a **ridiculous** thought—because **we are NOT His equals!** To **not** humble your pride and resistance before Him to not just incorrect—it is obnoxiously arrogant.

5. And that brings us to the final part what Jesus says here:

So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.
(Matthew 7:10-11 NLT)

-This gets into this issue of what you and I **really** think of God. For example—remember the issue of how people try to trick/manipulate God into giving them what they want? Parents, **do your kids have to do that to you—ask you in just the right way, make promises, so that you'll feed them properly and treat them right?** The answer? **NO! ABSOLUTELY NOT!** You don't trick them—give them a flat stone instead of bread—or a snake instead of a fish.

- a. Now, I don't know about you—but I've sinned in the past year. Maybe you have to. Go ahead, you can admit it—no one is watching. You did something mean, took advantage of someone, lied, said **yes** when you should've said **no**. That makes you and me...**sinful!** Probably more sinful than our kids—**we know better!**

-And yet, as **Jesus** says—you love your children and you give them **good** gifts, not evil gifts. In fact, you'd go hungry so they can get fed. You'd deny yourself a fun evening doing something cool to give **them** a fun evening doing something cool.

- b. The next question Jesus asks—or at least implies is **profound: ARE YOU A BETTER, MORE LOVING, KINDER PARENT THAN YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER?** I'll tell you why that's important. It's because it specifies his incredible love for us. In fact He is **less** stern and **less** stingy than you are!

-His posture toward you is that He's stooping down, leaning in, hands out—more **likely** to say **yes** than **no**. And if He **does** say **No**—or **Wait**—one of His frequent answers--it's for your good.

- c. Let me ask again. What do you **actually** believe about God? See, if you think He's selfish, uncaring, bored or annoyed—then **what's your basis for that?** And if that's how you **really** feel—then why would you ever want to be in Heaven with Him

forever? See, Satan has been on a smear campaign since the beginning of time. When you **believe** his lies, you're falling for the same trick that got us into this mess.

-The smear campaign tells us the God doesn't know what He's doing; if He did He'd clean up all the messes (messes we've created) and give us everything we want. Are there any parents who clean up all your kids messes and give them everything they want? **Good parents don't do that!**

6. Let's talk, in closing, about what it means to **ASK, SEEK** and **KNOCK**. The unstated part of this is, "Don't grab, don't demand, don't bargain, don't manipulate. **JUST ASK! Keep on asking.** The assumption is that, in life, we will **keep on needing**. Even when it comes to food, Jesus taught us to prayer, "Give us **today** our **daily bread**." The word **daily** means...**daily!** Every day.

-Can you imagine a parent saying to their 10 year old, "Okay—in that back of this mini-van is enough food for a year. We'll see you in May 2021! No, they want their children to come to the table—it's a relational thing! God wants our daily interaction with Him. He's a **relational** God.

-**Asking** implies, "I'm weak and small—like a little kid—but you're great and wise and kind! **I need your help!** Dad, the car is getting a little sketchy—can we talk about it?" To **ask** means, "I am **not** entitled! I **don't** just grab and run! Life is **not** about doing the right magic!"

- a. **Asking** is a form of politeness. If you need to use a friend's car...you **ask!** As a parent, you don't just barge into your teen's room—you **ask!**
- b. And why **seek?** Jesus says, **Keep ON seeking!** When you seek, you're engaging in the process—not just expecting that God will be your delivery boy. You ask God for a job and then you...**seek! Look for one!**

-And seeking, looking, investigating has a way of purifying us and our motives. See, when you **ask**—and what you've asked for doesn't just fall into your lap, it forces you to dig around a little in your world—**and in your heart**. You ask things like, "Do I need this? Why? What do I **really** want? Is this a substitute?"

-See, God has us in a process where the relationship between us and Him **grows**. It's a process where we learn patience; where we see the needs of others—not just our own. God is not a magic lamp you rub the right way; he's not a vending machine where you put in the right change. And He's not your servant; actually, you're **his** servant!

- c. And finally...**why knock?** Well, the truth about life is that there are obstacles. There are **locked doors**. Sometimes that's all we see, you know. The door to something we want or need is shut or locked—and we're standing outside angry and frustrated and hurt—cause the door doesn't just **open** when we walk by. Jesus says, "**Knock! See what happens. Knock again!**"

-In **our** world, we're more likely to try to kick the door down or pick the lock. "I **want** to be in there, I **need** to be in there, I **demand** to be let in!" Jesus says, **Why don't you knock? Ask to come in?**

-See, knocking is an **act of respect**. Think about it; if someone began turning the knob and kicking the door to your house--trying to get inside—what would you do? If you lived in Arkansas, you'd get a shotgun. In the GTA, you'd call 9-11.

-See, typically it's thieves and murderers who try to force their way in without knocking. By the way, you might remember that when it comes to your kids and your friends that **knocking** and waiting for a response shows respect for them, their rights, and their privacy.

7. Let's talk about the other side of **keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking**. That's actually what **God** does. I mean, think about it—He created everything. He runs the universe. He has unlimited power and authority. And yet...? He doesn't demand—He **asks**.

-He **asks** us if we want to be forgiven—cause He's made a way—at an **awful** cost to Himself. Do you? Do you want to **be** forgiven and **feel** forgiven? Just say **yes!** Jesus asks us to **follow** Him—not on Instagram, but to **actually** follow Him with our hearts and our feet. There are places we need to be—but never get to without **following** Him.

- a. He **seeks** too. The shepherding imagery is used all through the Bible. Psalm 23 says, **You restore my soul**. Those are 9-1-1 words. A sheep is lost or stuck, and unless the shepherd finds it and **restores it to the fold**—it will die. God comes **looking** for us! “Where **are** you Ken? Where **are** you Raymond? Where **are** you, Melissa?”
- b. And He also **knocks**. John, one of Jesus' inner circle is in solitary confinement on a chunk of rock called Patmos because of his faith in Jesus. He's visited by Jesus—who has a message for seven churches. In addressing a lazy, arrogant church, He says:

**“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.
(Revelation 3:20 NLT)**

-Jesus, creator and lord of all could've **vaporized** the door. But Jesus is a **gentleman**. He knocks and **waits** to be invited in. And **that's** what's been going on with some of you. Covid-19 has obliterated **all** the little 'g' gods you've been worshipping. In fact, He's been knocking on to door of your heart—this core where you make **all** your decisions.

-He wants things to be right with you. **He** sees the future and knows things will not end well without His help, His Power and His grace. If you don't listen—you're going to screw up something really important! But **He won't force Himself on you! Right now, He is waiting OUTSIDE the door--knocking**. So. Are you doing to let him in—or just keep **frustrating** and turning away His love?

8. There's one more thing I want to talk briefly about. As I've studied this passage—and implemented it into my life, I've realized that these three words, **Ask, Seek, Knock--**are a blueprint for discovering the will of God. For example, some of you **really** want to be married—just like I did when I was in my 20s. So I **asked!** It went something like this,

“God, you know I’m sick of just playing the field—dating recreationally to have some fun. I’m sick of it! Help me to find someone to spend my life with. **Big ask!**”

-How many of you have found that this is **all** you need to do. **Ask!** Then the girl...or guy of your dreams calls; “Hey there! I’m the one you asked for! Let’s get married!” No, **seeking** came next. For me, it was quite extensive. I traveled North America in this band—doing music **and seeking!** Sure enough, I met Lori after a concert—and said, “Now it’s time to **knock!**” **ASK HER OUT, KEN!** I did. And over the next weeks and months—writing, calling, working through issues, the **door opened.**

a. We followed that same process when we started The Olive Branch. We asked God what He wanted us to do. And it became clear, over time, that He wanted to do something new—that He wanted to build a church.

-So, we began seeking and knocking. We looked all over for a place to meet and got shut down again and again and again—and when we checked with Angus Glen—the door effortlessly opened.

-As **that** door began to close—and we were getting too large for them to have a golf club **and** a church in their facility—we started **asking** again. “God, where should we be?” We looked and looked and looked—sought, knocked on 30 some doors—and nothing opened.

-Out of the blue—kinda as a joke—our real estate guy said, “Why don’t you try the strip club, Friction, and see if they want to sell?” So we asked. **No!** We asked again. **No!** We asked again. **Silence.** We sought, **How much?** 10 million—3 ½ for the land, 3 ½ for the building. 3 for the business. We asked God—and sought them out. **Okay, 7 million.** We asked God—ferently! And came back and knocked, “We’ll give you for **4 million.**”

b. And in the middle of all this asking, seeking and knocking, the price actually went down to **3.925 million.** Then that started **another** whole process of asking, seeking and knocking. Getting God’s approval; getting the approval of our people—and then seeking and knocking with our people; **Will you make the biggest sacrifice of your life!**

-And **now?** Well, for **now** we have a building we can’t actually meet in! That will change!

c. Here’s what I know—from life—from all these processes I’ve been in. What Jesus said is **absolutely true!** **ASK! SEEK! KNOCK!** Come before God like little children—and you’ll be shocked what He does!

9. As we close, I know that some of you are facing **immense** challenges in your life. Here’s what I know. When Jesus said, “When you ask in faith—you’ll see **mountains** moved—thrown into the sea!” He was telling the exact truth! He’s God—there is **no** challenge too big for Him! Ask. Seek. Knock—cause those who ask...receive. Those who seek—find. And to those who knock—doors will be opened. **TRY IT!** Why not **now?**