

Family or Formula?

Matthew 7:7-12

Intro

Let's begin our time together by defining the words **family** and **formula**...

family — *a group of people who are closely related to one another by blood, marriage, or adoption...*

formula — *a plan or method for dealing with a problem or for achieving a result...*

- Now, what do the words **family** and **formula** have to do with our study this morning?...

Simply this — as we come to this section of Scripture I believe that we have a choice to make...

*Will we view the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:7-12 as **instructions for family members** or as **a formula for achieving certain results**?...*

You see, one of the things that I find most disturbing in my own heart is my desire **to find formulas to make life turn out the way that I want it to turn out...**

- I often find myself in a search for the *right method to use*, the *right words to say*, the *right book to read* that will make the complicated equation of life solvable...

Now, because I am not the only one doing this — because *so many* professing Christians are doing the same thing — there is a comfort to be found in this search for formulas...

- We may find that we are saying to ourselves what we used to say to our parents — ***“Everybody’s doing it!”***...

And it is easy to pursue formulas because the professing Christians with the largest platforms are usually those who are offering formulas to help us achieve what we want in life...

- They offer formulas for a better marriage and family, formulas for more financial prosperity, formulas for more influence in culture, and on and on it goes...

And I understand the allure — because I want all of those things — I want those ends — I’m just looking for the means...

- ***But as much as I may want those things — I would argue that formulas are not the answer...***

Because we were not created for formulas but for family...

And the harsh reality is that families cannot run on formulas...

Because there is no need for ***relationship*** with formulas...

- *Formulas are essentially like magical incantations...*

All that is required is for certain words to be said in a certain order — for certain materials to be present in the right quantity — and the desired outcome is secured...

No relationship required...

On the other hand, relationship is absolutely essential for a family to exist...

- In fact, God Himself — the one, true God — the ground of all reality — is an *eternal relationship* of three divine Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit...

It seems that God is a family — He's not a formula...

And the first human beings that God created were to be a family — a husband and wife...

- Through intimate relationship with one another they were to be fruitful and multiply — they were to create more members of the family...

But things went badly very early as Adam & Eve sinned in the Garden and mankind was alienated from right relationship with God — the family was broken up...

- And this the story of mankind — ***all of human history is a really a family drama...***

Human beings — made in God's image — live in rebellion and have continued to make life about *formulas* for trying to get what they want...

- ***But getting what we want is not the meaning of life — getting what we want is not what we were created for...***

We were created to be a part of a family — God's family...

God created us so that we might have *relationship* with Him — that we might become like Him and do the sort of works that He does...

- And the great irony is that if we will *let go of our formulas* and embrace God as our true family, then we will find what we were truly looking for...

We will find love, acceptance, purpose, meaning, and joy...

Now, it is true that in this life we will only experience the firstfruits of each of these...

- But we will experience them *increasingly* as we live in close communion with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ...

We will grow in our understanding that it is ***family*** and not ***formulas*** that makes life worth living...

So, with this as our introduction, please follow along as I read the passage that we will be studying this morning...

Matthew 7:7-12 (NKJV)

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

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

11 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!

12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Let's move into our first section...

1) The Invitation (vs 7-8)

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Let's begin by defining our terms...

ask — *a request made by an inferior to a superior...*

seek — *to look for; to strive to find...*

knock — *to knock at a door in order to gain entrance...*

So, what we have here in vs 7 is an **invitation** from the Lord Jesus to **ask, seek and knock...**

And the words **ask, seek & knock** are in the *present imperative* in the Greek...

This means that the Lord Jesus is inviting us to keep asking, to keep seeking and to keep knocking...

Now, some commentators see **ask, seek and knock** as increasing in intensity over time but I see them simply as three aspects of the same thing...

- [ex. your dog is missing — you will likely ask, seek and knock all at once — you will make every effort to find your dog...]

So, I see this invitation to **ask, seek and knock** as an invitation to ***persistent prayer*** — as an invitation to **ask, seek and knock** so that God the Father might respond to us...

Now, let's look at vs 7-8 together...

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

At this point we must make a decision — if we look at these verses as a **formula** then we will believe it is a blank check...

All we have to do is find the right level of intensity of asking, seeking and knocking and we can get whatever we want...

- *And it is this sort of interpretation that is the foundation of the so-called “faith & prosperity” movement...*

All that is needed for me to get whatever I want is *the right formula* — I just have to say the *right words* in the *right order* with the *right amount of faith* and I will get what I want...

But this not how things work in a family...

Believing that vs 7-8 are a *formula* reduces God to a cosmic coke machine — if I insert the right currency and push the right button then I can get whatever I want...

- Or to put in another way, life with God becomes a sort of escape room — if I figure out all the clues and solve the puzzle I can win the prize...

This is not what the Lord Jesus is teaching in these verses or anywhere else in the Bible...

So — if the Lord Jesus is not giving us a formula — what is He teaching us?...

I believe that the Lord Jesus is inviting us into active membership within the family...

You see, we understand that ***passivity*** and ***withdrawal*** are common among family members — especially when those family members feel that things are not going their way...

But the Lord Jesus is calling on us as family members to be active and engaged...

- *The Lord Jesus is inviting us to keep on asking — to keep on seeking and to keep on knocking...*

He is letting us know that we will receive a response...

As we ask — there is Someone who will give to us...

As we seek — there is Someone who will help us find it...

As we knock — there is Someone who will open the door and let us in...

With that said, we must remember that the Someone who gives, reveals and opens is the Sovereign of the Universe...

- ***And that it is up to Him to give, reveal and open — in His way and in His timing...***

Let's move now to our second section...

2) The Examples (vs 9-10)

*Here in vs 9-10 the Lord Jesus uses two **examples** that will lead into His **exhortation** in vs 11...*

9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Example #1 — What earthly father would give his son a stone when the son asks for bread?...[expand]

- This would not be the normal behavior of an earthly father — a normal father would give bread to his hungry son...

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

Example #2 — What earthly father would give his son a serpent when his son asks for a fish?...[expand]

Again, this is not the normal behavior of an earthly father — a normal father would give a fish to his hungry son...

- Pretty straightforward teaching...

And these examples lead us into our third section...

3) The Exhortation (vs 11)

11 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!

There is a great deal to unpack in this verse...

And the first thing to notice is that the Lord Jesus uses one of His common styles of argumentation — *the argument from the lesser to the greater...*[expand]

With this in mind, let's break down this verse as seek to understand what the Lord Jesus is teaching us — and He begins with...

If you then, being evil,

Here the Lord Jesus is testifying to the sinfulness of fallen mankind — that we are **evil**...

evil — *evil in a moral or spiritual sense, wicked, malicious, mischievous...*

Genesis 8:21 (NKJV)

...Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.”

Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV)

**“The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?”**

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

So, the clear testimony of Scripture and of human history is that mankind is evil...

The Lord Jesus continue in vs 11...

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,

As parents — even though we are evil — we are still able to give good gifts to our children...

- We work so that they might have food, clothing, shelter and an education...

We are evil and yet we are still able to give our children good gifts simply so that they might enjoy life and become who they were created to be...

- *And as we continue on in vs 11, Jesus' argument from the lesser to the greater becomes clear...*

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!

There you have it...

If we — as evil people — are able to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our perfect Father give good things to us as we **ask, seek and knock?**...

- *As we consider this exhortation from the Lord Jesus, we would be wise to think about how we choose **which** gifts to give our children...*

In our best moments, when we are walking in love and wisdom, we only give to our children what we truly believe is best for them...

- And though our children may try to use some formula on us to get what they want — if we are walking in love and wisdom then we will not give in...

Why? — because we know that what they are asking for would not be good for them...

- ***And if we are walking in love and wisdom, no amount of asking, seeking and knocking from them will sway us — because we refuse to give them what is bad for them...***

They are family and no formula will cause us to give them what harms them...

And if we — in our fallenness — are able to stay strong and give only what is good, how much more will God the Father stay strong and only give us what is good?...

Please notice again the end of vs 11...

how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Please understand — God is only willing to give us what is good for us!...

This is the reason why formulas do not work on God — because God is unwilling to give us what is bad for us...

- ***No matter how earnestly we ask, seek and knock — if what we want is something that He knows is bad for us then He will not give it to us...***

We see this issue addressed in...

James 4:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

So, as we consider these truths, I believe we would be wise to remind ourselves of that the Lord Jesus taught in...

Matthew 6:7-13 (NKJV) [please turn there...]

7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.**

10 Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

**12 And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.**

**13 And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.**

**For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.**

If God is our Father then we are a part of His family — and He will only give us what is good for us — no formulas needed and no formulas accepted...

This truth reminds me of how Adam Clarke described God...

“a Being who, from his infinite wisdom, cannot err or be deceived, and from his infinite goodness, can do nothing but what is eternally just, and right, and kind.”

These beautiful words are absolutely true — and when we believe them — when we believe that God will only give us what is good — then we will be able to echo the words of the Lord Jesus in...

John 4:34 (NKJV)

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”

And we will believe the words of Jim Elliot who wrote, “God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.”

Let’s move now into our final section...

4) The Application (vs 12)

12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

When we let go of formulas and rest in the fact that we have a Father who will always give us what is best for us, we are freed to live an others-focused life...[expand]

Now, please understand that the Lord Jesus is not giving a formula here in vs 12...

He is not telling us to treat people well so that they will treat us well...

- Instead, He is essentially saying, *“You want what is best for yourself — that’s understandable — so now go and do what is best for others”...*

“Go out and love your neighbor as you already love yourself”...

- And what the Lord Jesus has taught us in this section frees us to do this because we do not have to be self-seeking...

And why do you not have to be self-seeking?...

Because God is your Father and He is ready and willing to give you what is truly good for you...

- You can let go of all of your formulas and trust that He will secure what is good for you as you ask, seek and knock...

You no longer have to look out for #1 — you can deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus because the Father knows what you need before you ask Him...

Conclusion

So, as we close, I urge you to let go of all formulas — to stop trying to get what you want...

- Instead, trust that as a believer in Jesus Christ you have been adopted into the family of God and your good Father knows how to give you good gifts...

Ask, seek and knock in faith...

Not with faith in your words — but with faith in your Father — with faith that He loves you and that He knows what is best for you...

- Ask, seek and knock on behalf of others — make your life about Loving God and loving others and trust that God will see to your good because you are family...

Let's pray...