

THE GOLDEN RULE OF JESUS
Matthew 7:7-12
Ted Schroder, January 29, 2012

What sort of relationship did you have with your father? I have a friend whose father was extremely taciturn, was verbally challenged, and emotionally absent. There was little or no communication between them. The father was probably very proud of his son but found himself incapable of expressing it. There was hardly any affirmation. Maybe his relationship with his own father was similarly handicapped. The model of masculinity was that of the strong, silent type. My friend was raised to be completely self-sufficient. He never received any help with his education. He worked his way through college. He learned never to ask his father for anything but to take care of it by himself. They did not do things together. He rarely took time to teach his son or to pass on anything of value. When his father died there was little grieving because the relationship was so dissatisfying. Despite all this, my friend has become an exemplary father himself, with close and open communication between himself and his children – due, no doubt, to his experience of a close relationship with Jesus and his heavenly father.

I have another friend whose relationship with her father was warm and close. She was made to feel that she was very special to him. He praised her beauty and her mind. He encouraged her to excel in her studies. She felt she could go to him with any problem. He was her hero. She worshipped him and he loved her. He was like that because he had a similar relationship with his own parents growing up. His parents adored him and it showed in his self-confidence and kindness. He gave to his children what he had received as a child.

We cannot change our heritage. Some of us grew up in loving families and others grew up in dysfunctional families with all sorts of problems. We cannot choose our earthly parents. Yet Jesus wants us to enter into a relationship with his heavenly Father and with one another that is loving, affirming and kind.

The Golden Rule of Jesus is unique because it is positive in its admonition: “Do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” The whole moral law of the Old Testament is summarized in this saying. Pass on to others what you would wish to have been passed on to you. Treat others as you would wish to be treated. That is why I try to tip waiters generously!

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God whom Jesus reveals to us is that loving, heavenly Father who wants to bless us, affirm us, encourage us, provide for us and support us in life. William Barclay writes, “Any man who prays is bound to want to know to what kind of God he is praying. He wants to know in what kind of an atmosphere his prayers will be heard. Is he praying to a grudging God out of whom every gift has to be squeezed or coerced? Is he praying to a mocking God whose gifts may well be double-edged? Is he praying to a God whose heart is so kind that he is more ready to give than we are to ask?”

The portrait Jesus draws of God is that of a heavenly Father who is much more loving, kind and giving than we could ever be. “Which of you, if his son asks for bread will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to

those who ask him!” Just as it gives us pleasure to give to our children what they need or enjoy, how much more will our heavenly Father give us what we need or enjoy?

If this is so, we should have no hesitation in coming to God with our heartfelt needs. We are to “Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Jesus is encouraging us to pray, and to persevere in prayer even when the results are delayed.

But what about unanswered prayer? Not all prayers are answered as we would wish. That is because prayer is always conditional. Prayer is not magic. It is not a matter of waving a magic prayer wand and believing it will happen as we desire it. That would be very dangerous for us. God is wise enough to give us what gifts will be good for us. He would not give us what would hurt us or others. He would not give us gifts which would indulge us and prevent us from maturing in a healthy way. Our heavenly Father knows what is best for us.

“You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 4:2,3)

What are our motives when we pray? Is our heart pure? Do we want what God wants for us? Do we want what will further the kingdom of heaven? Do we want what will store up treasures in heaven? William Barclay again: “If a man’s prayers are simply for the things that will gratify his desires, then his prayers are essentially selfish, and, therefore, it is not possible for God to answer them, for to answer them would be to do nothing other than provide the man with ways of sinning. The true end of prayer is to say to God, ‘Thy will be done.’ The prayer of the man who is pleasure-dominated is: ‘My desires be satisfied.’ If, when a man prays, his prayer is only for things which may help him to satisfy his own desires, then he has sent to God a prayer which God cannot answer. It is one of the grim facts of life that a selfish man can hardly ever pray aright. We can never pray aright until we remove self from the center of life, and put God into the center of life.”

Jesus told the parable of the son who came and asked his father for his portion of his inheritance. The father gave him what he asked and he went off and wasted it. Sometimes we get what we ask for and it does us no good, and often it leads us into evil. But the Gospel message is that the loving father welcomed back his prodigal son when he had come to himself and realized what he had done. His older brother didn’t ask for anything and resented his father’s generosity. His father reminded him: “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.”

That is what Jesus is saying to us. You have such a loving heavenly Father. He is always with us. Everything he has is ours if we need it. He encourages us to ask, seek, knock. He wants to give us good gifts. He wants to encourage us, affirm us, and support us. He wants us to pass on to others what we have received from him. We have a wonderful spiritual heritage. No matter what our earthly family of origin may have been like – good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, kind or cruel – we have been born again into the family of God. We are accepted in Jesus. We are beloved. We can go to our heavenly Father with any problem and he will hear us. We need never feel rejected or unworthy. We are very special to him. God is always present to us in Jesus if we will receive him.