Hungering for More of Jesus and His Kingdom (Mt. 5:6; 6:33; 7:7)

I. REVIEW: HUNGERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (MT. 5:6)

A. There is always a greater measure of grace to experience—renewing and empowering grace, etc. The Father uses prayer to draw us into deeper relationship with Himself and to produce in us gratitude, humility, and love. He is not unaware of or unconcerned about our needs.

*He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God...gives grace to the humble.” (Jas. 4:6)*

*Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may...find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:16)*

B. Jesus taught on the blessedness of hungering for more in the grace of God. He called us to seek Him for a greater release of righteousness in our hearts, for others, and in society.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.* (Mt. 5:6)

C. Blessed: Jesus promised that all who walk in the Beatitudes would be blessed. This includes having a vibrant heart because of experiencing the activity of the Spirit in the inner man, feeling God’s presence, having grace to walk in the eight beatitudes, and ministering His power to others.

D. Righteousness: Believers do not need to seek God for more of the free gift of righteousness—this was freely and fully given to us on the day we were born again (2 Cor. 5:17, 21). In our legal position before God, we were given Jesus’ righteousness instantaneously (Rom. 3:21-31). In our living condition, we are to hunger for an increase of righteousness to fill our mind, emotions, and behavior. We experience this as a process throughout our Christian life.

E. Paul, the premier teacher on grace, diligently pressed in for the prize of walking in the fullness of His destiny in God’s grace. Some who proclaim a distorted grace message wrongly teach that we should no longer press in to God for more grace to experience the fullness of God in our lives.

*Not that I have already attained...I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me [fullness of Paul’s destiny]...I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call [fullness of Paul’s destiny] of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12-14)*

F. Hunger: Hunger is one of the most important signs of life. Lack of hunger is a serious sign of sickness in the spirit. When there is no hunger for a sustained period, then there is no life.

G. Many live in a “spiritual intensive care unit” without any hunger for prayer or the Word. This is abnormal Christianity. Hungerless and passionless Christianity is not normal from God’s point of view. The Spirit will increase our spiritual hunger for Jesus if we ask Him. Gaining new ground in the grace of God—growing in our hunger and pursuit of God—is the only way to keep the ground we have today. Our heart is either growing colder or hotter. It is not staying the same.

H. They shall be filled: We will progressively experience more grace for righteousness in our lives and being used by the Lord in prayer and/or service to see righteousness increase in others.
II. SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A. Jesus calls us to seek first God’s kingship, kingdom, and righteousness (Mt. 6:33). To seek first His righteousness includes obedience to His commands. Righteousness is the distinctive lifestyle of Jesus’ disciples, who hunger after it (Mt. 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 7:24).

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Mt. 6:33)

B. Seeking first God’s righteousness is the same as seeking to love God with all our heart. Obeying and loving Jesus are synonymous. All of His commands are based in His love. Our obedience to His commands is an expression of our love for Him (Jn. 14:15, 21).

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart…” (Mt. 22:37)

“If you love Me, keep My commandments… He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” (Jn. 14:15–21)

III. SEEKING GOD FOR ABUNDANT GRACE (MT. 7:7-8)

A. In pursuing a lifestyle of seeking first the kingdom (6:33) and loving God with all of our heart, Jesus called us to pray with perseverance and confidence for God’s help (Mt. 7:7-11). He called us to ask and keep on asking, to seek and keep on seeking, and to knock and keep on knocking. The verbs are in the continuous present tense, indicating that we are to do this consistently. We are not to trust our natural strengths, but to continually seek God to experience more grace.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Mt. 7:7-8)

1. Ask: for God’s supernatural intervention to touch you and those you are in tension with
2. Seek: for God’s wisdom on how to walk in the eight beatitudes and/or to solve tensions
3. Knock: to overcome obstacles (closed doors) that hinder our growth and/or reconciliation

B. There is an asking which is casual, where we put little effort into seeking God, because it is not something we value. When we highly prize something, we search for it as hidden treasure.

“You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jer. 29:13)

C. The disciple’s abiding relationship with God (Jn. 15:5) is a key to an increased breakthrough for our hearts. In view of our weakness, we are to pray with perseverance for God’s help.

D. Paul called us to pray with all perseverance (Eph. 6:18). He exhorted us to “strive” (Rom. 15:30), “labor fervently” (Col. 4:12), and “wrestle” (Eph. 6:12) in prayer.

“Praying always…with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Eph. 6:18)
IV. ENTER THE NARROW GATE (MT 7:13-14)

A. Those who profess to be believers seek Jesus in two very different ways. Some choose the broad way (7:13), others the narrow way (7:14). We are strengthened to enter the narrow gate by consistently asking, seeking, and knocking to experience more of God’s help (7:7).

13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many [it is popular] who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few [it is unpopular] who find it.” (Mt. 7:13-14)

B. The broad way: It is popular because it has few restrictions, giving much room for compromise. Those on this road can follow their fleshly desires. It is the road of tolerance and permissiveness. This message emphasizes Jesus’ promises of blessing, but dismisses His requirements (spiritual disciplines and denying the flesh, etc.) and warnings (rebukes and judgments).

C. The narrow way: Few choose this way, because it is difficult on our fleshly desires, which must be denied (Mt. 16:24). It requires that we renew our mind by turning from our natural thinking (Mt. 16:23). It has clear boundaries defined by God. To walk on this road we must leave behind many things that are not in God’s will—lust, pride, covetousness, etc. The narrow way is unpopular, because people want to live without feeling conviction for their sin. They want to feel good about their relationship with God without needing to deny their fleshly desires and plans.

23 He…said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan…for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men…” 24 If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Mt 16:23-24)

D. Leads to life: This life includes delighting in the supremacy of Jesus, which brings us into deep fellowship with God that lasts forever and makes our spirit vibrant in this age, etc. Jesus desires relationship with His people that flows from mutually loving each other with all of our heart—Jesus loves me with all His Heart, and we love Jesus with all our heart. The distorted grace message promises blessing and forgiveness without emphasizing repentance; thus, it does not lead to strengthening our love and partnership with Jesus that begins in this age and lasts forever.

E. Jesus exhorted us to strive, or to exert effort, to enter the narrow gate of obedience. We do not strive to earn forgiveness, but rather to position ourselves for a greater breakthrough in our heart.

24 “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many…will seek to enter and will not be able.” (Lk. 13:24)

F. Striving has two very different meanings in the New Testament. We are not to strive to earn God’s love. However, we are to strive in the sense of putting effort into our relationship with God, similar to how we put effort into our relationships with family and friends, etc.

G. Striving, in the good sense, is an expression of love. If we do not strive in this way, by putting effort into the relationship, then we are not loving God with all our heart and strength. In what sense must we resist striving and in what sense must we embrace it? When we answer this in the wrong way, we embrace errors that thrust us into legalism or compromise.
H. **Wrong striving**: We must never strive to receive God’s love (acceptance or forgiveness). It has been freely given to us because of Jesus’ work on the cross. If we strive to earn God’s love, we deny the truths of the gospel. Striving in the sense of seeking to establish our own agenda and striving to make people respond to our ministry or ideas by pressuring them are also wrong.

I. **Biblical striving**: Jesus calls us to exert great effort in walking in the narrow way (Mt. 7:13-14). We strive to obey God (Lk. 13:24; Acts 24:16; Heb. 12:4) in ministry labors (Col. 1:29), in prayer (Rom. 15:30), for unity (Phil. 1:27) and in being diligent to enter God’s rest (Heb. 4:11), disciplining our body (1 Cor. 9:27), and pressing into God (Phil. 3:12-15).

   
   16*I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.* (Acts 24:16)

   4*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.* (Heb. 12:4)

2. Believers are to be diligent to renew their minds, so that they can enjoy God’s rest.

   11**Let us therefore be diligent [make every effort, NIV] to enter that rest…** (Heb. 4:11)

3. Jesus called us to make radical choices in our cooperation with the grace of God. He spoke of “cutting off our hand” or “plucking out our eye” (Mt. 5:29-30).

   29*“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out…for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”* (Mt. 5:29)

J. **Easy yoke**: Rest in this context is a spiritual rest for our soul, or heart, not a physical rest for our flesh. The opposite of rest is not diligence; it is restlessness with emotional turmoil. Lazy people are often very restless, spiritually and emotionally.

29*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am…lowly in heart [meek, humble], and you will find rest for your souls. 30*For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”* (Mt. 11:29-30)

1. Taking on Jesus’ yoke is not about freely receiving forgiveness, but embracing meekness. We are to be yoked to Jesus and His Sermon on the Mount lifestyle of meekness—it is difficult on fleshly desires but easy on our heart as it fills us with great peace.

2. Bearing Jesus’ easy yoke results in enjoying His peace in our heart as we deny our flesh by ceasing to fight for our honor, recognition, and comfort, etc. Great freedom comes to our heart when we renounce agendas that compete with Jesus’ will for our life. The hard yoke (on our heart) is to live with anxiety, rejection, fear, turmoil, envy, etc.

K. What is **difficult** to our flesh is often an easy yoke to our heart (spiritually and emotionally). What is **easy** to our flesh is often difficult on our heart (spiritually and emotionally). Some believers seek in vain for an “easy” path for their flesh that is also “easy” for their heart.