

Dr. Bill Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Session 15, Matthew 7:7ff, Persistence in Prayer Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Session 15, Matthew 7:7ff, Persistence in Prayer, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Bill Mounce's lecture on Matthew 7:7-29 of the Sermon on the Mount explores themes of persistence and confidence in prayer. He examines the exhortations to ask, seek, and knock, suggesting it's an ongoing process that shapes both the asker and the request. **Mounce contrasts this with the assurance that God, as a loving Father, gives good gifts.** He then analyzes the concluding section of the sermon, highlighting the imagery of two gates, paths, trees, and houses, emphasizing the necessity of both hearing and actively obeying Jesus' teachings. **The lecture stresses that true faith involves not just initial conversion but a continuous, often difficult, path of discipleship that prepares believers for life's challenges.**

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Session 15 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Sermon on the Mount).



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3. Briefing Document: Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Session 15, Matthew 7:7ff, Persistence in Prayer

Briefing Document: Dr. Bill Mounce on Matthew 7:7ff - Persistence in Prayer and Series of Twos

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Bill Mounce focuses on the concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount, specifically Matthew 7:7-29. Mounce divides this section into three main themes: persistence in prayer (verses 7-11), the Golden Rule (verse 12), and a concluding series of "twos" emphasizing the necessity of action and genuine faith (verses 13-29). He emphasizes the practical implications of these teachings for Christian life and ministry.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Persistence in Prayer (Matthew 7:7-11):

- **Contextual Interpretation:** Mounce suggests this passage might be connected to the difficulty of living out the commands in the preceding verses (7:1-6), offering prayer as a source of strength and perseverance. It might also apply to the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount.
- "And what I wanted to say is that when you look at 7, 1 to 6, it's simply not possible... And so it might be that what's happening in verse 7 is that Jesus is recognizing that. And he wants to talk about how we get the strength to persevere."
- **Emphasis on Ongoing Action:** The verbs "ask," "seek," and "knock" are in a verbal form that emphasizes a continuous, ongoing process.
- "The verbal form of all these verbs emphasizes this: the ongoing process, continuing to knock, continuing to seek, continuing to ask."
- **Purpose of Persistent Prayer:** While acknowledging that prayer may move God, Mounce highlights that the act of persistent asking also shapes the individual and their requests.
- "As you and I continue to ask, it shapes us. And as you and I continue to ask, it shapes what we request."

- **Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18):** Mounce uses this parable to illustrate that persistence in prayer can move even an unjust "judge" (representing God, though not literally). The widow's persistent cries, rooted in a culture of shame, eventually compel the judge to act.
- "Just as she was persistent and moved the judge to do what was right, so also there's something about our persistence in prayer that moves God to do what he might not otherwise do."
- **When to Stop Praying:** Mounce shares a common answer he's received from respected individuals: one stops praying for something when God removes the desire from their heart. This suggests that some prayers serve to change the one praying.
- **Confidence in Prayer:** Jesus uses the analogy of a father giving good gifts to his children to assure believers that their Heavenly Father will also give good gifts. Matthew focuses on "good gifts," while Luke's parallel mentions the Holy Spirit.
- "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?"
- **Answered Prayer:** Mounce posits that there is no such thing as unanswered prayer; every prayer is answered in God's way and in God's time. He shares an anecdote about a man praying for a wagon as a child, only to realize years later that his experience flying a jet was God's ultimate answer.
- "I say there is no such thing. Every prayer is answered. It's just answered in God's way and in God's time."

2. The Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12):

- **Summation of the Law and Prophets:** Mounce understands the Golden Rule ("So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets") as a concise summary of the entire Old Testament.
- "So, what are... Let me say some things about the Golden Rule. Law and prophets are a standard Jewish way of referring not just to the Torah and the Nevi'im but to the entire Old Testament."

- **Positive Formulation:** Unlike similar statements found in other traditions (e.g., Hillel's negative formulation: "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else"), Jesus' version is positive, emphasizing proactive good deeds rather than just avoiding bad actions.
- "Jesus' formulation of it causes positive actions, not just doing, not just, there are too many negatives here, not just not doing bad things but doing good things."
- **Connection to the Greatest Commandment:** Mounce explores the potential overlap between loving God and loving neighbor (the greatest commandment) and the Golden Rule. He suggests that love for God enables one to love their neighbor, and that love for neighbor manifests as treating them as one wants to be treated.
- "But I think it's our love for God that enables us to love others, right? It's our love for God that enables us to treat other people as we want to be treated."

3. The Series of Twos (Matthew 7:13-29):

- **Call to Action:** This final section emphasizes that hearing the Sermon on the Mount is insufficient; a decision must be made and action taken to enter the Kingdom.
- "And the point in this is Jesus wants to drive one fundamental point home. The kingdom has to be entered. It's not enough to hear it, but a decision has to be made, an action has to be taken, you have to do something."
- **Two Paths (Narrow vs. Wide):** This powerful image contrasts the difficult path leading to life, entered through a narrow gate (requiring humility and leaving behind self-sufficiency), with the easy, broad road leading to destruction.
- "Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it, but narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."
- Mounce contrasts the "theme song" of the broad road ("Invictus" - emphasizing self-mastery) with that of the narrow path ("Nothing in my hand I bring, but to thy cross, I cling" - emphasizing reliance on Christ).
- **Two Kinds of Trees (Good vs. Bad):** This metaphor warns against false prophets who may appear outwardly righteous ("sheep's clothing") but are inwardly destructive ("ferocious wolves"). They are recognized by their "fruit" – their actions and teachings.

- "By their fruit, you recognize them. Not by what they appear to be but by what they actually produce their fruit."
- Those who do not bear good fruit will be "cut down and thrown into the fire."
- **Two Houses (Built on Rock vs. Sand):** This concluding analogy emphasizes the importance of not just hearing Jesus' words but also putting them into practice. The house built on the rock (hearing and doing) will withstand life's storms, while the house built on sand (hearing but not doing) will collapse.
- "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock... But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."
- Mounce highlights that both houses may initially look the same; the difference in foundation is revealed when trials come. He connects this to the importance of discipleship beyond initial conversion.
- **Two Destinations/Consequences:** Implicit in the two paths and two houses is the idea of two ultimate destinations or consequences.

Implications for Christian Life and Ministry:

- **The Necessity of Deep Obedience:** Mounce stresses that true faith involves more than just outward actions or claims; it requires a deep and consistent obedience to God's will, as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount.
- "Your righteousness has to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. The only ones who are going to get into heaven are those who truly do the will of my Father."
- **Warning Against False Security:** The passage about those who prophesy, drive out demons, and perform miracles but are ultimately rejected by Jesus serves as a stark warning against relying solely on outward religious activity without genuine heart change and obedience.
- "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven... Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers."
- **The Importance of Discipleship:** Mounce criticizes churches that only focus on salvation (the "gate") and neglect the ongoing path of discipleship. He argues that

a failure to teach and nurture believers in obedience leaves them unprepared for the "storms of life" and contributes to high rates of people walking away from their faith.

- "The church is full of people... who think that the gate is necessary and the path is optional. I think that is the essence of the problem of the American church."
- **The Authority of Jesus:** Mounce concludes by emphasizing the unique authority with which Jesus spoke, contrasting it with the rabbinic tradition of quoting other authorities. Jesus spoke as God, demanding acceptance and obedience.
- "Jesus spoke with the authority of God. And that He simply said, this is the way it is... You have heard it said, but I tell you."
- **A Challenge to Pastors:** Mounce challenges pastors to consider what kind of church and ministry they want to lead – one that embraces the challenging truths of the Sermon on the Mount, preparing people for the narrow path, or one that offers a more comfortable but ultimately less secure faith. He stresses the eternal consequences of their teaching.
- "That my challenge to you all is, what kind of pastor are you going to be? And what kind of church do you want your church to be?"

Key Takeaway: The conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, as explained by Dr. Mounce, is a powerful call to persistent prayer for strength, a commitment to living out the Golden Rule, and a recognition that true faith necessitates both entering through the "narrow gate" of salvation and diligently walking the "difficult path" of obedience and discipleship. Failure to do so risks encountering false prophets and building a life foundation that will not withstand the inevitable storms.

4. Study Guide: Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Session 15, Matthew 7:7ff, Persistence in Prayer

Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 7:7-29 Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to Mounce, what is one possible way to interpret the verses on prayer (Matthew 7:7-11) in relation to the preceding verses in Matthew 7?
2. What does the repetitive nature of the verbs "ask," "seek," and "knock" emphasize in Matthew 7:7?
3. According to the lecture, what is one reason why persistent prayer might be important, even though God already knows our needs?
4. What is the significance of Luke's parallel account of Matthew 7:9-11 stating that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask?
5. What is the essence of the Golden Rule as presented in Matthew 7:12, and how does Jesus' formulation differ from similar statements found elsewhere?
6. What is the overarching point Jesus is making in the final section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:13-27) through the "series of twos"?
7. Describe the imagery of the two gates and two roads presented in Matthew 7:13-14, and what do they represent?
8. According to the lecture, what are the two dangers along the path to life that Jesus warns about in Matthew 7:15-23?
9. What is the significance of Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:23, "I never knew you," in relation to those who perform seemingly religious acts?
10. What is the central contrast in the metaphor of the two houses in Matthew 7:24-27, and what does it illustrate about hearing and doing Jesus' words?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Mounce suggests that the verses on prayer might be Jesus recognizing the difficulty of the demands in the preceding verses (e.g., not judging, discerning dogs and pigs) and offering prayer as a means to gain strength to persevere in living them out. Another possibility is that these verses apply to the entirety of the sermon as Jesus concludes his teaching.

2. The repetitive verbal form of "ask," "seek," and "knock" emphasizes the ongoing and continuous nature of prayer. It is not a one-time action but a persistent process of continually bringing our requests and desires before God.
3. Persistent prayer shapes us and what we request over time. While it may move God to act, the act of continually asking also serves to mold our hearts and align our desires with God's will.
4. Luke's parallel suggests that the "good gifts" God gives are not just material blessings but ultimately the gift of the Holy Spirit. This raises the question of whether the two accounts describe the same sermon and highlights the ultimate provision God offers.
5. The Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12 is to "do to others what you want them to do to you." Jesus' formulation is positive, emphasizing proactive good actions, unlike negative formulations found elsewhere (e.g., "what is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else").
6. Through the series of two paths, trees, and houses, Jesus emphasizes that merely hearing the Sermon on the Mount is insufficient. A decision must be made, action must be taken, and the teachings must be put into practice to enter the kingdom and experience true life.
7. The wide gate and broad road represent an easy path where people do not have to acknowledge their spiritual depravity or live according to God's standards, leading to destruction with many travelers. The narrow gate and difficult road represent the path to life, requiring humility and effort, with few finding it.
8. The two dangers are false prophets, who may appear outwardly righteous but inwardly are destructive, and those who claim to follow Jesus and perform religious acts but do not truly do the will of the Father, evidenced by a lack of deep obedience.
9. Jesus' statement "I never knew you" signifies a lack of a genuine, personal relationship with Him, despite outward displays of religious activity. True entrance into the kingdom requires more than just performing works in Jesus' name; it requires a deep obedience to God's will.
10. The contrast between the wise man building on rock and the foolish man building on sand illustrates the importance of not just hearing Jesus' words but also putting them into practice. When the storms of life come, only the house built on the foundation of obedience will stand.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of persistence in prayer as taught in Matthew 7:7-11, considering both its impact on God and its effect on the believer. How does Mounce interpret this passage in the context of the challenges presented in the earlier part of the Sermon on the Mount?
2. Analyze the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) as the summation of the law and the prophets. How does Jesus' positive formulation of this rule expand upon similar ethical principles found in other traditions, and how does it relate to the greatest commandment?
3. Explore the imagery of the two gates and two roads (Matthew 7:13-14) as a call to decision and action. What are the characteristics of each path, and what does this metaphor reveal about the nature of true discipleship according to the Sermon on the Mount?
4. Examine the warnings against false prophets (Matthew 7:15-20) and those who perform religious acts without true obedience (Matthew 7:21-23). What criteria does Jesus provide for discerning true and false teachers and followers, and what does "doing the will of the Father" entail?
5. Compare and contrast the two builders in Matthew 7:24-27 as a concluding metaphor for the Sermon on the Mount. How does this analogy emphasize the importance of obedience to Jesus' teachings in withstanding life's challenges and securing one's eternal destiny?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Beatitudes:** The opening statements of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12), outlining characteristics of those blessed by God.
- **Censorial:** Expressing disapproval or criticism.
- **Discernment:** The ability to judge well; keen perception or judgment.
- **Persistence (in prayer):** The quality of continuing steadfastly or firmly in prayer, despite delays or apparent lack of response.
- **Confidence (in prayer):** The assurance or certainty in approaching God in prayer, based on His character as a loving Father.
- **Parable:** A simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.

- **Golden Rule:** The principle of treating others as one wants to be treated (Matthew 7:12).
- **Law and the Prophets:** A standard Jewish way of referring to the entire Old Testament.
- **Narrow Gate:** The metaphorical entrance to the path of true discipleship, requiring humility and commitment (Matthew 7:13-14).
- **Broad Road:** The metaphorical path of ease and worldly conformity that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).
- **False Prophets:** Individuals who claim to speak for God but teach falsehood and lead people astray (Matthew 7:15-20).
- **Fruit (spiritual):** The outward evidence or results of one's inner character and faith, particularly in actions and attitudes (Matthew 7:16-20).
- **Deep Obedience:** A thorough and genuine adherence to God's will that goes beyond mere outward actions (Matthew 7:21-23).
- **Foundation (spiritual):** The underlying basis or principle upon which one's life and faith are built, particularly the words and teachings of Jesus (Matthew 7:24-27).
- **Scribes and Pharisees:** Jewish religious leaders in the time of Jesus, often criticized by Him for their hypocrisy and legalism.
- **Justification:** The act by which God declares a sinner righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.
- **Sanctification:** The process of being made holy or set apart for God, growing in Christ-likeness.
- **Perseverance of Faith:** The doctrine that those who are genuinely saved will continue in faith until the end.
- **Great Commission:** Jesus' command to his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).
- **Discipleship:** The process of learning from and following Jesus, including obedience to his teachings and transformation of one's life.
- **Assurance of Salvation:** The confident belief that one has eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

5. FAQs on Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Session 15, Matthew 7:7ff, Persistence in Prayer, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Matthew 7:7-29

1. What is the main point Jesus is making in Matthew 7:7-11 regarding prayer? Jesus emphasizes the importance of persistence and confidence in prayer. The repeated verbs "ask," "seek," and "knock" highlight an ongoing process, urging believers not to give up in their requests to God. Furthermore, using the analogy of a loving earthly father who would not give his child harmful things when asked for good, Jesus assures us that our Heavenly Father will also give good gifts to those who ask Him. This underscores the confidence we can have in God's willingness and ability to answer our prayers.

2. Does persistent prayer imply we need to constantly remind God of our needs? While God knows our needs, the act of persistently asking, seeking, and knocking shapes us and refines our requests. It demonstrates our earnestness and dependence on God. Moreover, the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18 illustrates that our persistence can move God to act, not because He is unwilling, but because our continued asking aligns our hearts with His will and purpose. It's not about nagging God, but about a continuous posture of seeking Him.

3. In Matthew 7:9-11, what is the significance of comparing a father giving a stone instead of bread or a snake instead of a fish? This comparison serves to highlight the inherent goodness of earthly parents towards their children. Just as a loving father would instinctively give good nourishment (bread, fish) and avoid giving harmful substitutes (stone, snake), our infinitely more loving Heavenly Father can be trusted to give good gifts to those who ask Him. This passage builds confidence in God's benevolent nature and His desire to provide for His children's genuine needs. In Luke's parallel account, the "good gift" is identified as the Holy Spirit, suggesting that God's ultimate provision is spiritual empowerment and guidance.

4. According to the lecture, what is the significance of the "narrow gate and wide road" metaphor in Matthew 7:13-14? This metaphor illustrates that entering the kingdom of God requires a deliberate choice and a challenging path. The "wide gate and broad road" represent an easy, popular path that ultimately leads to destruction, where individuals do not confront their spiritual depravity or submit to God's will. Conversely, the "narrow gate and difficult road" symbolize the path to life, requiring humility,

perseverance, and a willingness to follow Jesus, even when it's not easy or popular. The imagery emphasizes that true discipleship demands commitment and effort.

5. What are the two dangers Jesus warns about on the path to life in Matthew 7:15-23? Jesus warns of two significant dangers: false prophets and those who merely claim to follow Him without truly doing the will of the Father. False prophets (7:15-20) may appear outwardly righteous ("sheep's clothing") but inwardly are destructive ("ferocious wolves"). They are identified by their "fruit"—the results and teachings of their lives. The second danger (7:21-23) involves individuals who profess faith ("Lord, Lord") and even perform seemingly spiritual acts (prophesying, casting out demons, miracles) but are ultimately unknown by Jesus because they do not practice "deep obedience" to the Father's will as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount.

6. How does the lecture connect the idea of "doing the will of the Father" (Matthew 7:21) with the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount? "Doing the will of the Father" is not just about performing spectacular religious acts but involves the deep, transformative obedience called for throughout the Sermon on the Mount. This includes recognizing spiritual poverty, mourning over sin, being meek, hungering for righteousness, showing mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, enduring persecution, avoiding judgmentalism, loving enemies, and practicing the Golden Rule. It's about internal transformation and consistently living out the principles Jesus taught, not just outward displays of religiosity.

7. What is the significance of the "two houses" metaphor in Matthew 7:24-27? This final metaphor of the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes the crucial difference between merely hearing Jesus' teachings and actually putting them into practice. The wise person who builds their house on the rock represents those who hear and obey Jesus' words, establishing a firm foundation that can withstand life's storms. The foolish person who builds on sand represents those who hear but do not obey, resulting in a structure that will inevitably collapse when challenges arise. The passage underscores that true security and resilience in life come from active obedience to Christ's teachings.

8. What is the authority with which Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount, and how does it contrast with the scribes and Pharisees? Jesus speaks with the inherent authority of God Himself. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees who based their teachings on interpretations of previous rabbinic traditions, Jesus declares "I tell you," claiming the right to reinterpret and fulfill the Old Testament law. His authority is not derived from human sources but from His divine identity. This direct and self-assured authority was evident to His listeners, setting Him apart and demanding a personal response to His teachings and to Himself.