

# The **A.S.K.** Formula for Recruiting Stephen Ministers and Stephen Leaders

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*“Ask and it will be given to 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.”*

Matthew 7:7-8 NIV

I’ve experienced two extremes in recruiting people to serve in the church.

- **Arm twisting, guilt, and manipulation.** Church leaders persuade, coerce, or cajole people into filling open slots in the institutional church. Their “I know what’s best for you” may be ill informed and presumptuous.
- **Passivity.** Church leaders lack the courage to assertively ask people to serve, so they rely almost exclusively on passive recruitment activities that let them avoid relating face to face—such as bulletin items, newsletter articles, or public announcements. Although more subtle than the first extreme, it’s equally debilitating.

Neither extreme works. When leaders resort to them, the people who end up doing ministry do so begrudgingly, not joyfully. They don’t get to use their gifts in meaningful ways. They fail to grow spiritually. Mission opportunities are lost. God’s kingdom suffers.

For service to be joyful, meaningful, and life changing, congregations need another way to get people involved. Thankfully, Jesus has given us one.



## The Keys for Recruiting People to Serve

Here are three key principles of recruiting people to serve in the church, whether in Stephen Ministry or in any other role:

1. **Rely on the Holy Spirit.** Remain confident that God’s Spirit is working powerfully in our lives and in other Christians. Expect the Holy Spirit to move people to respond to appropriate requests to serve.
2. **Utilize Spiritual Gifts.** Give people opportunities to use their spiritual gifts in ministry. Avoid asking them to serve in areas that don’t match their spiritual gifts.
3. **Recognize Freedom to Ask and Freedom to Respond.** You have a perfect right to ask people to serve—and people have a perfect right to say “yes” or “no.”

A biblical way to put these principles into action is the A.S.K. formula—Ask, Seek, Knock (Matthew 7:7-11). This was the way Jesus called his disciples and involved people in kingdom ministry. It’s extremely practical and, without a doubt, the best way to find the right people for the roles of Stephen Minister and Stephen Leader.

## Ask, Seek, Knock: The A.S.K. Formula

As the acronym suggests, the A.S.K. formula has three simple elements.

### 1. Ask People



Asking is a freeing, grace-full way to recruit people to serve as Stephen Ministers and Stephen Leaders. Asking people respectfully, thoughtfully, and caringly is non-manipulative and process oriented. And when the request carefully considers the person's spiritual gifts and speaks to the heart, it's also very powerful.

Although it's simple, asking requires a fundamental virtue: courage. You demonstrate courage when you talk with people face to face. Use the in-person conversation to:

- Explain your understanding of the person's spiritual gifts and why you believe the Spirit has qualified the person for this ministry.
- Describe the ministry need Christ has made known and how the person's service will make a difference in people's lives—and glorify God.
- Assertively ask the person to serve, making your request kindly, convincingly, courteously, intelligently, and as urgently as you can.<sup>1</sup>
- After you've asked, listen. Strive to hear and understand the person's response.
- Identify and address possible obstacles that may stand in the way of a positive response, but never coerce or compel—God's love is motivation enough. It's the most compelling force in the world.

This is a Christ-like way to invite people to serve—and to minister to them personally and powerfully.

### 2. Seek People



Don't just look for anyone who's willing to say "yes" to your invitation. Seek people whom God has already gifted and chosen for service in Ste-

phen Ministry. Help them recognize the gifts God has given them and how they can use those gifts to bless others.

Pray that God will show you who those people are. Whenever God calls a community to perform a ministry, he provides the gifts and resources that community needs to perform it. The people and gifts are there—possibly right under your nose. Ask God to open your eyes to them.

Seek beyond the people who are already active and highly visible. Look also for those whose gifts have been ignored or gone unused. They may be easy to overlook because they're less likely to come forward or make themselves noticed. Search diligently.

The course *Discovering God's Vision for Your Life* can be extremely helpful for you.<sup>2</sup> People's experience in this course often surprises them, showing them gifts they didn't realize God had given them. It also confirms what people may have intuitively known but had never openly acknowledged. Using spiritual gifts discovery and education is an important way to seek and find the people who are a good fit for Stephen Ministry (or any other ministry).

### 3. Knock on the Heart's Door— with Love



People are more likely to respond when you speak heart to heart, when you connect spirit to spirit.

If you ask in a way that makes it sound as if you're just trying to fill a position or assign a job that the institutional church needs done, people are more likely to keep the doors to

their lives and service locked. But if you ask in the name of Christ—boldly and urgently, with God’s purpose and mission at heart and the person’s gifts and passions in mind—then the Holy Spirit is knocking on the person’s heart through you. God’s power is in your request. When God touches people’s hearts, they are moved to act and respond.

Real love changes people. We can open ourselves to it as a flower opens to the warm rays of the sun, or we can run away from it. But either way, love—God’s love in Jesus—is reaching out through your request. That makes a life-changing difference.

## Freedom to Respond

Of course, you can’t control how people will respond when you A.S.K.

- They may respond enthusiastically: “I’m so glad you asked.” In fact, they may have been *waiting* to be asked. This confirms that God has been working to prepare them for your request to serve.
- They may initially resist what they sense to be God’s call, but they can’t shake it off. People may say something like, “I told myself I really didn’t want to do this, but God won’t let me off the hook. It’s scary—but it’s clear God is calling me, so count me in.” Affirm them for taking the courageous step of answering God’s call.
- They may respond, “Maybe.” They’re not sure, and they need to think and pray about the request. Give them the time they need. Assure them that you’ll be available to answer questions or help them think through issues because you want what’s best for them—as God does.
- Some may say “no,” but that doesn’t necessarily mean they’re rejecting the request. Think carefully about what the person’s “no” might mean.

- » Sometimes “no” means “not right now.” If you sense this, ask whether you can get back with the person later on. Then, when you follow up, his or her answer may be a happy “yes.” Timing is important. It must be God’s timing—not ours.
- » Sometimes a person says “no” due to a lack of confidence or understanding. If you suspect this, caringly say, “Tell me more.” Listen to understand what the person says, and then speak to his or her concerns, questions, or feelings. He or she may need you to give more information or encouragement.
- » Sometimes a “no” is a clear, unmistakable “no.” This is good to know too, because it shows that this was not the right ministry for the person. Respect the answer and move on to talk with others. If you find a ministry opportunity that might better fit the person, you can ask, seek, and knock again.

When Jesus asked people to follow him, some turned sadly away, and others willingly left their fishing nets, routines, and daily work to join him. We may not realize how many people are willing to follow Jesus into ministry. We just have to be willing to ask them.

## A Simple yet Profound Privilege

To ask, seek, and knock is beautifully simple yet profound. On the one hand, it requires less of you—no more coaxing, cajoling, arm twisting, incentivizing, and anxiety. On the other, it requires much more. A.S.K.-ing requires you to respond to God’s requests of you—to be assertive, bold, and courageous.

The A.S.K. formula is not just a skill or a technique. It’s an attitude, a perspective, and an approach—of faith, hope, and love—that shapes your request. It’s a privilege to use the A.S.K. formula, because you are presenting another person with an opportunity of a lifetime:

- to grow closer to Jesus, as well as to grow closer to other disciples.

- to use his or her spiritual gifts to glorify Christ and build up his body.
- to know God more deeply and serve the church and the world God so loves.

When you realize how lovingly God has sought and found you, you're just as eager to search diligently for those who will join you in God's mission. When you've heard Jesus knocking on your heart's door and opened your heart to Jesus, you know the joy and power of his risen presence in your life. This gives you the courage to knock boldly on the door of another's heart in Jesus' name, communicating God's love and inviting that person to the greatest adventure that he or she can hope to have.

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### Notes:

- 1 Asking is about being assertive. Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers learn the skills of relating assertively from this Stephen Ministry textbook:
  - » Ruth N. Koch and Kenneth C. Haugk, *Speaking the Truth in Love: How to Be an Assertive Christian* (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 1992)
- 2 *Discovering God's Vision for Your Life: You and Your Spiritual Gifts* is a comprehensive, fully integrated set of materials with an eight-hour course as its centerpiece. This is a valuable resource that will help you search for people with spiritual gifts and passion for leading or serving in Stephen Ministry—or for any other ministry in the congregation.



You can download additional copies of this document at [www.stephenministries.org/ASK](http://www.stephenministries.org/ASK).