

## The Infinite Goodness of Our Heavenly Father

### Matthew 7:7-12

[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 the one who **seeks** *finds*, and to the one who **knocks** it will be *opened*.

[9] Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

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

[11] If you then, who are 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] “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

#### **BIG IDEA:**

Jesus teaches another important issue: **Why pray?** This is a big question.

If God is perfectly good, infinitely wise, and sovereignly in-charge, why bother to pray? In our text, **Jesus teaches we should pray in obedience to the command of God and with confidence in the goodness of God.**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

We come to another passage concerning prayer in verses 7-11, and this passage may seem to have little direct connection with the verses that we have just studied, but in fact, their relationship is obvious if you give it a little reflection.

Christ has just been instructing His disciples on how they are to relate to others. How they are to not judge and how they are to judge. In verses 1-5, He has been telling them that they should not be hypocritical.

They should not be harsh and quick to judge, they should certainly not judge in accordance with their own opinion, but in verse 6, He has made it clear that they must judge. For if they are not to be overcritical, neither are they to be naïve. And so they need discernment.

They must judge, but they must not judge harshly or according to mere opinions, but rather they should judge graciously. And in according to the standards of God’s word, not hypercritical, but appropriate critical.

Surely as soon as the believer hears that we must balance that awesome task, of judging appropriately without becoming one who wrongly or censoriously judges others, it ought to drive us to our knees and that is precisely where the Lord Jesus takes us.

He takes us to the subject of prayer in verses 7-11. He has already dealt in this sermon with the duty of prayer. He has dealt with the method of prayer. He has even given an outline of the content of prayer, as well, as talking with the disciple's attitude in prayer.

Back in Matthew chapter 6, verses 5-15, but here He speaks of prayer as the appointed means through which our Heavenly Father provides our needs, especially our spiritual needs, and in this context fulfills our need for discernment.

Who is sufficient under these things when I must be discerning and to determine when to judge and when not to judge and how to judge charitably and not to judge harshly, only the Lord can give that wisdom and we gain that wisdom as we look to Him in prayer.

The Lord teaches us about prayer and encourages us about prayer in this passage.

## **TRANSITION**

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

### **A. A CALL TO BELIEVING PRAYER (vv. 7, 8)**

The verbs - **ask, seek, knock** - are all imperatives. This call to prayer is not a suggestion, recommendation, or encouragement. It is a divine command.

**Jesus orders us to ask for what we need, seek what we desire, and knock where we want to enter.**

We are to pray by asking, seeking, and knocking.

Keep in mind as well that what we are asking, seeking and knocking for is not some object, but the character qualities of true righteousness in our life.

**God wants us to be asking, seeking and knocking.**

These imperatives give several practical instructions for believing prayer.

#### **1. PRAY WITH DEPENDENCE.**

Verse 7 says, **“Ask, and it will be given to you.”** True prayer is about more than asking God for things. But the focus of this passage is clearly on making petitions of God.

The word **“ask”** is the key term of the text, occurring in each of these five verses. This is how we should make out petitions to God.

We are not to tell God what to do or make any claims on God or speak positive confessions that God is required to perform. We are to simply ask God for what we desire of him.

The word **“ask”** implies asking for a conscious need.

The word **“ask”** denotes dependence upon God. In fact, our faith in God can be measured by what we ask God for. When we pray, we are not informing God of anything that he does not already know.

**Matthew 6:8** says that “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

- Our prayers affirm our trust in God's sufficiency.
- Our prayers are a declaration of dependence.
- Our prayers express our confidence that God is ready, willing, and able to provide what we need.

#### **2. PRAY WITH EARNESTNESS.**

Verse 7 says: **“seek, and you will find.”**

The word **“seek”** involves asking but adds action. The idea is not merely to express one’s need, but to get up and look around for help. It involves effort.

If asking denotes dependence, seeking denotes **earnestness**. One reason we do not pray as we ought is because when we have a need, we are inclined to do something about it. And we don’t consider prayer as really doing something.

But the command to seek teaches us that prayer is not a passive activity. It is not to let go and let God. It is to hold on and let God.

We are to work as if it all depends on us and pray as if it all depends on God.

**If you want to live a righteous life, then you must actively pursue it by pursuing after God.**

You do not become righteous by being passive.

We should pray earnestly, passionately, and fervently.

**James 5:16b** says: *"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*

But your prayers will never mean anything to God until they mean everything to you. God responds to those who diligently seek him.

In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus says, *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

### **3. PRAY WITH BOLDNESS.**

Verse 7 says: **“knock, and it will be opened to you.”** In **Luke 11:5-8**, Jesus tells a parable about a man who had guests to arrive at his house unexpectedly in the middle of the night. But this host did not have anything to feed them. So he went to his neighbor’s house and knocked on the door, asking for bread. His sleepy neighbor initially refused to get up and give him anything. But the man kept knocking. So the sleepy neighbor finally got up and gave the man whatever he wanted, so he could get back to bed.

Jesus told this parable to teach us that God is not a sleepy neighbor. You do not have to harass God to get what you need. If you knock in faith God will open the door for you.

**Hebrews 4:16** says, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

**“With confidence”** means freedom of speech. We can come to God with boldness, confident that he will provide the grace and mercy we need.

Don’t give up in your efforts to seek God, even when the doors seem closed. Continue to ask him for more knowledge, patience, wisdom, love, and understanding. He will give them to you.

### **4. PRAY WITH PERSISTENCE.**

These imperatives **ask, seek, knock** – are all in the present tense, which denotes **continual action or habitual activity**.

Literally, Jesus says, **"Keep on asking, seeking, knocking."**

Jesus is driving his point home, and the point is this: We are to passionately persist in prayer.

We naturally persevere in our prayers when someone close to us is sick. If one of our children becomes ill, we pray without ceasing.

Likewise, if we are in financial trouble or if we are hoping for a promotion or if we have a frightening or dangerous task ahead of us, we generally find it easy to pray.

But do we persist in our prayers for spiritual growth for ourselves and others?

Do we "ask ... seek ... knock" for a pure mind?

Do we keep on knocking for a forgiving spirit or for the removal of an angry or critical spirit?

I think that Christians usually do not! Consider what would happen if God's people understood what Christ is saying here and put it to work.

We give ourselves to passionate prayer for our spiritual development only when we sense our need for God's grace. God's kingdom requires righteousness—perfection. We are called to be holy as he is holy (Leviticus 19:2).

Only "the pure in heart will see God" (Matthew 5:8). We know that though we do good things, we are evil—that all of us, Jews and Greeks, are under sin (Romans 3:9).

The sight of God's perfect standard and our sin drives us to our knees and to his grace. We learn that there is no hope apart from his unearned favor.

There is no hope for spiritual improvement apart from his continuing love and mercy. The one who sees this rejoices when he reads Jesus' invitation to "ask ... seek ... knock."

We are to ask and keep on asking for those things that will make us more like Jesus.

We are to seek and keep on seeking. We are to knock and keep on knocking.

We must remember that God is not only good in that he willingly gives marvelous blessings to his children, he is also wise, knowing what gifts to give and when they are best granted.

I thank God that he is wise and loving enough not to have granted me some of the things I've asked for!

**So Jesus bids us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking. Pray with persistence. Don't stop praying.**

## B. A PROMISE OF ANSWERED PRAYER

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

Each of these calls to prayer is accompanied by a corresponding promise of answered prayer.

As if these promises are not clear enough, Jesus says **verse 8**, *"For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."*

Without conditions, restrictions, or stipulations, Jesus declares that God will hear and answer our prayers. This is the promise of God you can count on when you pray.

**Psalm 50:15** says, "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

**Jeremiah 33:3** says, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

**1 John 5:14** says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

I am grateful this verse is not a blank check for just anything we want in life. God knows much better than we do what we need.

So we must read this promise in light of other things scripture teaches about prayer. Scripture interprets scripture.

A biblical doctrine of prayer acknowledges that there are some who cannot claim the promises of this text.

Unbelievers cannot expect God to answer their prayers. We have access to God in prayer through the blood and righteousness of Christ. Without faith in Christ, no one can expect to have an audience with the living God.

The only prayer God promises to answer for unbelievers is **Romans 10:13**: "*For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"

Likewise, unrepentant believers cannot expect God to answer their prayers. **Psalm 66:18** says, "*If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*" Unconfessed and unforgiven sin hinders prayer.

This does not mean you have to be perfect to get an answered prayer. If so, there is no hope for any of us.

But sin separates you from God. So when you pray, you must make sure that you are on speaking terms with God. **Proverbs 28:13** says, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

Furthermore, Christians who pray with selfish motives cannot expect God to answer their prayers. **James 4:2b** states the number one reason why we do not receive answered prayers: "You do not have, because you do not ask." But **James 4:3** adds: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

But the fact that you are a sincere, godly believer does not guarantee you will receive everything you ask God for.

Paul was given a thorn in the flesh. He prayed three times for the Lord to remove it. But the Lord answered "**No!**" But he gave Paul two consolation blessings in **2 Corinthians 12:9** - "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

## II. PRAY WITH CONFIDENCE IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

In **verses 7-8**, Jesus commands his disciples to pray and promises God will answer our prayers. But how can we be sure that prayer works?

Jesus answers in **verses 9-11** by focusing our hopes on God's holy character. When we pray, we must not put our confidence in our sense of worthiness, the words we say, or the power of prayer. But we can pray with confidence in the goodness of God.

DEREK PRIME wrote: "When we declare that God is good we are saying that he is in every way all that he as God should be, something that marks him out as altogether different from us."

Indeed, God is not like us. So we can pray with absolute confidence that God is good all the times. Jesus makes this point by comparing the goodness of human fathers and the goodness of the heavenly Father.

## A. THE NATURAL GOODNESS OF HUMAN FATHERS

In **verses 9-10**, Jesus asks two rhetorical questions about the instinctive goodness of human fathers: "Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?" These rhetorical questions assume a negative answer.

A good father will not give his children useless or harmful gifts.

### 1. A GOOD FATHER WILL NOT GIVE HIS CHILDREN USELESS GIFTS.

In verse 9 Jesus says, "Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?"

Jesus pictures a young son who comes to his father with a simple request for bread. This was a staple for families in the ancient Near East. If they had nothing else, they had bread.

This boy is asking for basic necessities. He does not want an allowance or an electronic device or the keys to the car. He just wants bread.

How would a good father respond? What would he do? Will he give son a stone instead of bread? The bread of the poor was the size of a stone and the two could be confused. But the son could not eat a stone.

Would a real father respond to his child's hunger by giving a useless stone? Of course not. A good father will not give his children useless gifts. And neither will God.

God only gives gifts that fulfill us and nurture us and perfect us.

**James 1:17** says, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is not variation or shadow due to change."*

### 2. A GOOD FATHER WILL NOT GIVE HIS CHILDREN HARMFUL GIFTS.

Jesus asks another question in verse 10: "Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?" Again, Jesus pictures a son who comes to his father with a basic request.

Fish was another staple, along with bread. Remember when Jesus fed a hungry crowd of more than 5,000 men. When the disciples inventoried their resources, all they had was five barley loaves and two small fish.

Philip concluded it was nothing in the face of so many hungry people. It was just a boy's lunch that wouldn't fill one man, much less 5,000.

Jesus pictures a little boy who comes to his father for fish to eat.

What would a real father do? Will he give him a serpent or snake instead? A small reptile could resemble a small fish. Would a father play such a cruel joke on his son? Of course not.

To give a child a stone instead of bread would be a parental neglect of duties. But to give a child a serpent instead of a fish would be an act of child endangerment or child abuse.

A good father would keep his children away from snakes, not put them on his children's plate when they are hungry.

The fact that a good father will not give his children useful or harmful gifts helps us understand the mystery of unanswered prayer.

There are some things we ask God for and he says no because he knows that they are spiritually useless. It is God's ultimate will for you to be holy, not just happy. And it is only when you embrace God's will that you discover to be holy is to be happy!

**Romans 8:29** says: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

This is God's purpose for your life: that you be conformed to the image of his son. And God determines what he gives and withholds on the basis of what he deems is useful in making us more like Jesus.

Likewise, there are some things we ask God for and he says no because He knows that they are spiritually harmful. Sometimes what looks like a fish is actually a snake. And we are too childish to tell the difference.

*What would you do if your little child asked you for a dangerous snake? Would you give it?*

*What if your child cried and screamed and begged? Would you give it then?*

Your love for your child forces you to say no. There are times when God demonstrates his love for us by saying no to our requests.

## B. THE INFINITE GOODNESS OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Jesus makes his point by moving from the lesser to the greater. Verse 11 concludes: *"If you then, who are 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!"*

Note that Jesus calls his listeners **"evil."** Jesus is speaking primarily to his disciples, even though a larger crowd of people is listening.

These words are directly addressed to those who have put their faith in Christ and left all to follow him. Yet he calls them evil.

This is a powerful affirmation of the pervasive depravity of our sinful nature. Even after we are born again by God's sovereign grace, we still have remaining sin in our lives.

**Jeremiah 17:9** says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it?"

Every one of us, no matter how long you have been saved or how mature you are in Christ, still has evil in our hearts that can only be cleaned up by the sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit.

Even though we are evil, we know how to give good gifts to our children. We know how to provide for our children. We know how to take care of our children.

Here's the point: God is not like us! God is perfectly, infinitely, and unceasingly good.

We are good sometimes. And when we are, our goodness is tainted by iniquity in our hearts. But God is good all the time! In fact, God's goodness is the preeminent expression of his glory.

How much more can God be trusted to give good gifts to those who come to him in believing prayer! The proof of the Father's infinite goodness is the cross of Jesus.

**John 3:16** says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." We were dead in sin and had nothing good in us that would move us to ask God to for salvation. But God gave Jesus without us asking!

**Romans 8:32** says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

The evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, was the recipient of numerous benefits from the Lord. And he was suddenly seized with the realization that his heavenly Father was showering him almost more than he could take.

Overwhelmed, he prayed with a loud voice, "Stop, God!" Moody felt the Lord had been so good to him that he could not take any more. So he spontaneously asked God to stop blessing him!

Thank for God Moody's testimony. But that's not where I am.

My prayer is, "God, start!" He can stop on Moody, but I need him to keep working in me, on me, for me, through me, and around me. And God will work in our lives in a fresh, new, and life changing way if we come to him in believing prayer.

## The Golden Rule

*[12] "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

This is commonly known as the Golden Rule. Many religions teach a negative version of this statement. Confucius said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

Jesus made the statement even more significant. It may be easy to refrain from harming others, but it is much more difficult to take the initiative in doing something good for them.

A person may be able to keep the negative form of the law by avoiding sin, but to keep the positive form requires action. This is the key to the radical discipleship that Jesus wants.

The Golden Rule is the foundation of active goodness and mercy—the kind of love God shows to us every day.

The word "**so**" links Jesus' words "do to others what you would have them do to you" with the teachings presented thus far in the Sermon on the Mount (beginning at 5:1).

In essence, Jesus is saying that what God wants to see in our lives He initiates by the things He is already doing for us! He is doing for us what He wants us to do. This is the theological base for the "Golden Rule."

Not only does this rule describe briefly the behavior expected of Jesus' followers, it also sums up the Law and the Prophets.

**CONCLUSION**

Our assurance is this: God will give us anything that is good for us spiritually (anything!) if we keep asking him for it!

If you do not yet have eternal life through Jesus Christ, you may be sure he will give it to you if you ask with all your heart.

If you are a believer but are short on Christian graces, you need to keep praying.

If you often find yourself lying, if you begin to “ask” and “seek” and “knock,” God will help you become a truth-teller.

If you are not generous, make a habit of passionate prayer and he will give you a generous spirit.

If you are not kind but persistently seek God for a kind spirit, he will give it to you.

Just think what would happen if we prayed for these things for ourselves and our brothers and sisters as intensely as we pray for our physical needs. The church would explode because a far greater proportion of its people would be living kingdom lives. Our pulpits would be filled with preachers of power. The mission fields would shrink as thousands more poured out to the harvest—with greater power.

Do we want the character of the kingdom in our lives through the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

Jesus says we are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. We are to beseech God constantly and passionately for spiritual blessing.

**Do we pray like that? (Read Ephesians 3:20-21)**