



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 23
Matthew 7:7-11

Study By
Lorin L. Cranford
cranfordville.com

Greek NT

7 Αἰτεῖτε, καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν· ζητεῖτε, καὶ εὐρήσετε· κρούετε, καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν. 8 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὐρίσκει καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται. 9 ἢ τίς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος, ὃν αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ἄρτον — μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσῃ αὐτῷ; 10 ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ — μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσῃ αὐτῷ; 11 εἰ οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ διδόναι τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν, πόσῳ μᾶλλον ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς δώσει ἀγαθὰ τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν αὐτόν.

La Biblia

de las Américas

7 Pedid, y se os dará; buscad, y hallaréis; llama-d, y se os abrirá. 8 Porque todo el que pide, recibe; y el que busca, halla; y al que llama, se le abrirá. 9 ¿O qué hombre hay entre vosotros que si su hijo le pide pan, le dará una piedra, 10 o si le pide un pescado, le dará una serpiente? 11 Pues si vosotros, siendo malos, sabéis dar buenas dádivas a vuestros hijos, ¿cuánto más vuestro Padre que está en los cielos dará cosas buenas a los que le piden?

NRSV

7 Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

NLT

7 Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. 8 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks. 9 You parents -- if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? 10 Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! 11 If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

The Outline of the Text:¹

When Jesus finished his commentary on the Model Prayer (6:9-13 elaborated on in 6:19-7:6), He climaxes the discussion with a dramatic encouragement to now begin praying to the Heavenly Father in the way He has outlined. Mt. 7:7-11 stands as the conclusion of the discussion on prayer inside the Sermon on the Mount. Through the use of typical ancient thought patterns, namely the command / promise structure and a threefold synonymous parallelism, our Lord gives His disciples powerful incentive to make prayer a central part of their discipleship commitment. In 7:12 we return to the horizontal focus, after this extensive vertical focus, with the Golden Rule. Then in 7:13, the conclusion of the Sermon begins with a series of appeals to decision to follow Jesus and His teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven. The audience response is recorded by Matthew in 7:28-29.

The literary context of 7:7-11 is important to the interpretive process from several angles. **First**, it stands as the climax of the six previous pericopes, 6:19-21, 6:22-23, 6:24, 6:25-34, 7:1-5, and 7:6. This focuses the passage on prayer rather than generalized requests made to other people. **Second**, with it standing before 7:12, the so-called Golden Rule, these two passages together stress again the vertical / horizontal orientation of religious experience so important in the Sermon and derived from Jesus' Jewish heritage out of the Old Testament. We have already seen this emphasis in the Beatitudes and the Model Prayer. And now it surfaces once more. **Third**, in its connection to the Model Prayer in 6:9-13, it comes as a natural outgrowth of the emphasis on praying. After giving both instructions on praying in six petitions in the model prayer and then commenting on the implications of such praying in 6:19-7:6, the conclusion now is a dramatic stress to pray, pray, pray. And to do so in great confidence that God will hear and respond to this kind of praying. His promise is to answer (vv. 7-8) and His greater compassion prompts Him to answer (vv. 9-11).

Why pray? This is the question emerging out of 7:7-11. But in the context of Matthew 6-7 the question, How

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

should we pray?, precedes the why question. In the Model Prayer we have been taught to pray in six areas, the first three of which focus on God and His rule in this world. The second set of three petitions center on horizontal relationships of life in the day to day world. In the larger teaching on prayer in 6:5-15, we were reminded that prayer, both public and private, is ‘talking with God’ and not ‘talking to impress people’ (6:5-6). Furthermore, it is talking with a God who both readily hears our prayers and already knows all our needs; consequently we don’t need to bombard Heaven with tons of words in order to get God’s attention (6:7-8). Jesus’ own commentary on the Model Prayer in 6:18-7:6 dramatically calls us to high levels of obligation and commitment to God when we pray to Him. This is how we are to pray as disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven. With such demands and strict guidelines for praying, now the question, Why pray?, emerges in 7:7-11. The answer in 7:7-11 has its roots in 6:1 where prayer is one of three major expressions of commitment to God. One’s claim to be devoted to God is utterly false if that commitment doesn’t flow into a deep, consistent prayer life. You can’t claim to know God as your Heavenly Father and not spend time talking with Him! But beyond the obligation to pray as a disciple are the incentives to pray that Jesus lays out in 7:7-11. The Lukan parallel in Lk. 11:9-11² pushes these same words along a similar path. Prayer includes on petitions made to the Heavenly Father. In both Luke 11 and Matthew 6, the Model Prayer sets forth the boundaries for those petitions.

The natural twofold division of the text provides the outline for our study. Both sets of affirmations provide encouragement to be praying. The first set in vv. 7-8 affirm the promise that God will hear and answer our prayers in a manner consistent to His will. The second set in vv. 9-11 affirm that this same God as Heavenly Father deeply cares for the welfare of His children and thus will respond to our prayers as Father.

I. Encouragement to pray: God answers, vv. 7-8

7 Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

7 Αἰτεῖτε, καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν· ζητεῖτε, καὶ εὕρησέτε· κρούετε, καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν. 8 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὕρισκει καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται.

The threefold parallelism of this saying is clear:

Ask, and it will be given you	search, and you will find	knock, and the door will be opened for you
....
everyone who asks receives	everyone who searches finds	everyone who knocks the door will be opened

Several features stand out with this saying of Jesus. **First**, the saying has two parts. The command / promise segment in three expressions is followed by a rationale (for; γὰρ) supporting the first segment, using the same threefold expression. **Second**, the threefold parallelism is synonymous parallelism, that is, for dramatic emphasis the one idea is repeated three times. Ask, search, and knock are not three separate actions; rather, they are one essential action of making a petition to God in prayer.

The critical interpretive issue here is what is designated by the three verbs, Αἰτεῖτε, ζητεῖτε, and κρούετε. All three Greek verbs are broad and inclusive in scope, thus making the admonitions very general. The triplet emphasis pushes the reader to consider praying, praying, praying. But for what? The answer comes out of the literary context: pray for the things Jesus has instructed in the Model Prayer in 6:9-13. The Lukan parallel in Lk. 11:9-11 agrees with Matthew’s use of this saying of Jesus. Prayer includes on petitions made to the Heavenly Father. In both Luke 11 and Matthew 6, the Model Prayer sets forth the boundaries for those petitions.

²Lk. 11:1-13 (NRSV): 1 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” 2 He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.” 5 And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ 7 And he answers from within, “Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

When disciples pray as Jesus is teaching here, they can do so with full confidence of God hearing and responding to their requests. God will respond to their request, as He promises. One should be careful here to not miss interpret the promise. These admonitions and promises are not ‘blank checks’ giving disciples freedom to pray for their wants without consideration of the will of God. The promise of God’s granting “good things” (ἀγαθὰ) in verse ten is re-defined in Luke 11:13 as God granting the Holy Spirit as His response to prayer petitions.³ Otherwise, God ceases to be a wise Heavenly Father and merely indulges the selfishness of His children. Even pagan fathers know better than to do this. Prayer then moves toward magic and the paganism of the first century world.⁴ God’s response to our requests flows out of His compassion for us and His wisdom in knowing what is best for us.

Reasons, v. 8. The Old Testament stresses the faithfulness of God to respond to His children, e.g., Jer. 29:13; Prov. 8:17) and thus forms a starting point for Jesus’ emphasis here. In proverbial declaration Jesus affirms the dependability of God to deliver on His promises. The threefold emphasis here matches the above threefold admonition to pray.

II. Encouragement to pray: God cares, vv. 9-11

9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

9 ἢ τίς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἀνθρώπου, ὃν αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ἄρτον — μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 10 ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ — μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 11 εἰ οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ διδόναι τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν, πόσω μᾶλλον ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς δώσει ἀγαθὰ τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν αὐτόν.

In providing this second set of arguments for trusting God to respond to our prayers, Jesus anticipates some who might question the accuracy of His first claim in vv. 7-8. The appeal to the compassion of an earthly father in comparison to the Heavenly Father follows traditional Jewish scribal argument. What we have already experienced from our earthly father forms a basis for anticipating God’s response since He is the Heavenly Father, thus with much greater levels of compassion and resources.

Only a very perverted earthly father would give a stone in response to the request for bread by his child. Most likely Matthew stresses bread and stone in light of Jesus’ temptation experience in 4:3. Even more bizarre would be giving a snake when a fish was requested. Luke narrates a scorpion for a requested egg in Lk 11:12.⁵ The bread and fish represent basic, fundamental physical needs, not individual wants, being requested. Again, some signal of appropriate prayer requests is provided here.

What can be expected from the more compassionate Heavenly Father? “Good things!” (ἀγαθὰ). And what is that? The Greek adjective here means things inherently good and fundamentally of value. The highest good is affirmed in Jesus’ words by Luke in 11:13: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” By God granting the presence and leadership of God’s own Spirit in our lives, we receive the best possible response. The Holy Spirit brings the resources of the Heavenly Father into our life. God’s Spirit moves us to strictly follow the paths of living and behavior laid out by Jesus. Nothing greater than this is possible as a response to our prayer!

This text finishes the emphasis upon prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. But we have seen something wonderfully profound in the study of 6:5-15 and 6:19-7:11: Discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven is centered on a working relationship between the believer and the Heavenly Father. It’s not based on legalistic obedience as in the Judaism of Jesus’ day. It’s not focused on our proving ourselves worthy of divine acceptance. To the contrary, discipleship is relationship, the relation of a Heavenly Father with His children established through His Son’s salvational actions. At the heart of that relationship is continual communication between Father and children. Prayer is essential, vital rigorous praying is critical to a thriving relationship. But it is praying on Jesus’ terms, not ours.

³Careful consideration of the similar admonitions in Mt. 18:19; 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14; 15:7 should lead one to the same conclusion.

⁴Note the helpful observations of Dennis Okholm: “At this point we must guard against equating Christian belief in the efficacy of prayer and magic. Magic attempts to control or manipulate the divine will in order to induce it to grant one’s wishes, especially through the use of techniques such as charms, spells, rituals, or ceremonies. Christian prayer involves a struggle of wills in which the prayer attempts to persuade God, all the time seeing prayer as a divinely given means whereby the prayer can participate in God’s agenda.” [Dennis L. Okholm, “Prayer,” Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology online]

⁵ἢ καὶ αἰτήσῃ ὄφιν, ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ σκορπίον; This stands in contrast to Matthew’s ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ — μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ;

Diagram of the Sermon on the Mount

Mt. 5:21-26

The distinctive nature of this pericope is especially highlighted by the block diagram below, which is based on the original Greek text.

137 ^{7:7} **Ask**
and
138 **it will be given to you,**
139 **seek**
and
140 **you will find,**
141 **knock,**
and
142 **it will be opened for you;**
^{7:8} for
143 **everyone asking receives**
and
144 **everyone seeking finds**
and
145 **to the one knocking it is being opened.**

^{7:9} Or,
146 **what person among you gives him a stone?**
whose son asks him for bread,
^{7:10} or,
else
147 **(what person among you) gives him a snake?**
(whose son) asks him for a fish

^{7:11} Therefore
being evil
if you...know
to give good gifts to your children
how much more
148 **your Father...will give good things to those asking Him.**
who is in Heaven

The thought flow of these passage is clear. The first segment is vv. 7-8, which contain two units (#s 137-142) and (#s 143-145). The second segment is vv. 9-11, also containing a twofold sub-unit: #s 146-147 and 148.

In the first segment, #s 137-142, the statements come in three pairs: 137-138; 139-140; 141-142. The first statement in each is expressed in the Greek present tense imperative verb. This simply means an admonition with ongoing responsibility and could be expressed in English as 'be asking' etc. The threefold admonition demands a continuing pattern of verbal action, rather than a single instance. The second set of threes, #s 138, 140, 142, are expressed with the Greek future tense verb. The combination of imperative verb followed by future tense verb creates the very Jewish command / promise thought structure. The use of the passive voice in two of the future tense verbs highlights the statements as a divine promise. Essentially the pattern moves along the lines: you do this and God will do that. The choice of verbs in each set reflects the intention that the verbs complement each other: ask - grant; see - find; knock - open.

In the second unit, #s 143-145 move a different direction in order to provide a conceptual foundation for the three command / promise expressions. The causal conjunction $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ links the two units as admonition with reason. The rationale in verse eight shifts to the third person expression more natural to an axiomatic saying with timeless truth. The same or similar sets of verbs are repeated -- ask / receives; search / find; knock / open -- thus linking them to the command / promise units in matching forms. Thus the admonitions with the divine promise are re-enforced by the claim that meeting the demands of the admonitions guarantees success in divine response.

The second segment of the passage, #s 146-148, repeats the threefold emphasis of the first segment. But this time, the literary structure is that of a pair of rhetorical questions having to do with an earthly father's concern for properly responding to his son's request for food. The third statement, # 148, draws a comparison of the level of compassion of an earthly father to the much greater level of compassion by the Heavenly Father. The argument moves *ad maiore*, from the lesser to the greater, -- a pattern of argumentation commonly employed by Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day. If the lesser case is true -- and experience confirms its accuracy -- then one can be certain that the greater case will also be true -- and one's experience with God will confirm it as well.

The two segments -- vv. 7-8 and 9-11 -- are tied together by the disjunctive η (Or). The essential point of this word is to introduce another set of arguments. The nature of h] is to signal a new direction for what follows. Thus if the reader doesn't accept the first set of claims, then he should consider this new claim now being introduced.

The natural impact of the second segment in vv. 9-11 is to re-enforce the idea of God's compassion for His own children. God stands as the ultimate father figure who far exceeds any earthly father in care and compassion for his children.

