



“If ye the, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

The Father’s Children

Lesson Subject: God answers prayer for His children.

L102. Date: November 1983. **Text:** Matthew 7:7-11.

Topic: Jesus: Teachings of; Prayer.

“O Thou by whom we come to God / The Life, the Truth, the Way / The path of prayer thyself hath trod / Lord, teach us how to pray” (Anonymous).

Jesus grew up in a nation which practiced prayer. Each day had its “hour of prayer” when the people would go to the temple, or turn toward the temple, and pray to their God. He quoted Isaiah 56:7 and said, “*My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer*” (Mark 11:17).

The Jewish rabbis encouraged people to pray. Various sayings on prayer are attributed to them. “God is as near to His creatures as the ear to the mouth,” “A man is annoyed by being worried by the requests of his friends; but God — all the time a man puts his needs and requests before Him, God loves him all the more.”

The lesson text for this study has a beautiful literary form. Verses 7 and 8 each contain three lines of parallel thought. Verses 9 and 10 give two illustrations of the truth that God answers prayer. (Luke adds a third illustration in his account of this teaching in Luke 11:12.) Verse 11 makes a practical application of the teaching on prayer to your life and mine. We need to pray. God delights to hear and answer our prayers. Therefore, let us pray more, much more.

1. THE FATHER URGES US TO PRAY (Matthew 7:7)

“*Ask, . . . seek, . . . knock.*” That is the way to receive God's bounty.

Why do we not pray, when God urges us to pray? (1) There might be in us the workings of a self-sufficient pride. (2) There might be a spirit of laziness since prayer is often *“labouring fervently”* (Colossians 4:12), *“striving together”* (Romans 15:30), and a *“wrestling”* against spiritual foes (Ephesians 6:12, 18). (3) There might be a sinful heart of unbelief which has led us away from God (Hebrews 3:12). (4) There might be a cold spirit of unconcern for spiritual things in which one has lost his first love (Revelation 2:4). Whatever the reason, it is sinful not to pray. *“God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you”* (1 Samuel 12:23).

A. Let us “ask” for an answer to prayer. The very act of asking indicates our confidence in God's ability to answer prayer. There need be no question about that. His power is *“able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”* (Ephesians 3:20). Anything the mind of man is capable of conceiving, the power of God is capable of performing.

Our asking indicates also our confidence in God's willingness to answer prayer. There need be no question here. He invites us over and again in Holy Scripture to ask that He might answer. Do you lack anything? The Bible invites, *“Let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”* (James 1:5). God never rebukes us for asking too much or too often. His only rebuke is that we do not ask at all, or that we ask amiss (James 4:1~3).

B. Let us “seek” for an answer to prayer. If petition is not answered, let us seek the face of God to find out why. Is the petition wrong or are we wrong? God promises, *“Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:13).

Seeking is an intensification of asking. It is earnest pleading. Even Jesus “prayed harder” at some times than at other times: *“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly”* (Luke 22:44).

C. Let us “knock” for an answer to prayer. As seeking is more extensive than asking, leaving no stone unturned in pursuing an answer to prayer, knocking indicates persistence in the face of closed doors. (Luke gives this teaching following the parable of the man who knocked at his neighbor's door at midnight asking bread for an unexpected guest.) The purpose of the knocking is not to overcome rejection or refusal on God's part. Never!

Knocking will test your sincerity in prayer. If one seeming rebuff makes you quit, you are not in earnest in your petitions. Knocking will test your faith. An unbelieving heart is soon discouraged in prayer. It was to a woman who kept insisting on Jesus' help that He said, *“O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt”* (Matthew 15:28). Knocking will

test your patience. James said the trial of your faith produces patience (James 1:3). Discouragement should only make you redouble your efforts in seeking the mind of God through prayer and praying in His will.

Let us “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” with assurance of an answer.

II. THE FATHER ANSWERS PRAYER (Matthew 7:8)

Will you accept the word of Jesus as true? Of course you believe everything that Jesus said. Then believe these words: “*Everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened*” (verse 8). Jesus does not say that every petition will be given, but that everyone who prays will get an answer. What an encouragement to us to pray!

Do not get your attention centered on the “ask, seek, find” so that you overlook who is to “ask, seek, knock.” Jesus said, “*Ask, and it shall be given YOU; seek, and YE shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto YOU: For EVERYONE that asketh receiveth; and HE that seeketh findeth; and to HIM that knocketh it shall be opened*” (verses 7, 8). God will answer prayer for you. Pray, Christian, pray!

Luke 11:5-8 is the setting for this teaching. In it Jesus tells of a man who goes to a friend at midnight with a request to borrow three loaves of bread. The friend declines to get up out of bed and get it for him. Yet, because of his insistent asking and great need, he gets up and gives him all he needs.

Why did the friend hesitate? (1) The petition was by a friend, not a member of his family. (2) The petition was for purposes of hospitality, not to meet a critical need. (3) The petition came at an inconvenient hour. Therefore, he hesitated.

But none of those reasons applies when you pray to God. You are not a friend, but a child of God. He delights when you pray to Him. Your petitions are of concern to Him because they do relate to needs in your life or the lives of others. There is no inconvenient hour with God; therefore, you can come with confidence day or night. Not one of those reasons makes God hesitate. He is more than your friend. He is your heavenly Father. He knows and cares about you. It is His delight to hear and answer your prayer. “*The prayer of the upright is his delight*” (Proverbs 15:8).

Whose prayer will God hear? Consider these passages, “the righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles” (Psalm 34:17). “*He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper*” (Psalm 72:12). Jesus said that the man who

prayed for God's mercy was justified because God heard his prayer (Luke 18:13, 14). *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"* (Matthew 7:7). God hears the prayer of the righteous, the needy, the poor, the helpless, and you! You have His word on it.

III. THE FATHER GIVES GOOD ANSWERS TO PRAYER (Matthew 7:9, 10).

"If his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" (verse 9). Round pieces of limestone the shape and color of little loaves of bread are common along the shores of Palestine. But a loving father would not do such a cruel thing to his son as to give a stone when the child is hungry for bread, would he?

"If he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" The *"serpent"* of which Jesus speaks was probably an eel, which was unclean food according to Leviticus 11:12. A father would not mock his son's hunger by giving him forbidden food, would he? Of course not!

"If he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:12). The scorpion had claws to hold its victim and a sting in its tail to inflict excruciating pain. When it rest with its claws and tail folded in, its color and shape make it look much like an egg. But a loving father would not play such a cruel joke on his son, would he? No!

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (verse 11).

IV. THE FATHER ANSWERS PRAYER IN INFINITE WISDOM (Matthew 7:11).

We humans respond to our children on the basis of our imperfect knowledge and limited ability. Even so, our children have happy childhoods and grow up into productive adults.

God provides for His children on the basis of His infinite perfections. His provisions are always exactly what is needed, at the right time, in the right portion, by the right channels, and with the right ends. He never makes a mistake in His giving. With joy we can ask and receive.

A man told of placing an order by mail from a certain merchandising firm. On the order blank was a place to answer the questions, "May we

substitute if the item is out of stock?” With great hesitation he checked “Yes.” When the delivery was made the item was out of stock and the company had substituted. They sent him what he had ordered, but of a much better quality and much greater price; however, they charged him the same price as the merchandise he had ordered. After that he always wrote a large “YES” in answer to the question. “May we substitute?”

That is what it means to pray in the will of God. It means first that my own life is in the will of God. Then I offer my petition to God with the spirit, “Lord, if that is not the right thing to ask, You have my permission to substitute.” That is praying, “Not my will, but Yours, be done.” What God substitutes is always better than what I order.

Trust God; He knows better than you. *“Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him”* (Matthew 6:8). What He gives is best.

“I know not by what methods rare, / But this I know — God answers prayer. / I know that He has given His word, / Which tells me prayers is always heard, / And will be answered, soon or late. / And so I pray and calmly wait.

“I know not if the blessing sought, / Will come in just the way I thought, / But leave my prayers with Him alone, / whose will is wiser than my own, / Assured that He will grant my quest / Or send some answer far more blest” (Author unknown).

The greatest failure among Christians today is the failure to pray. No sin is more common (and less condemned) than the sin of prayerlessness. This study goes forth with the petition to God that Christians everywhere will be stirred up to become men and women of prayer.

“I am the LORD thy God, . . . open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Psalm 81:10). *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”* (Jeremiah 33:3).

QUESTIONS

1. What does Mark 11:17 say your church should be?
2. How does I Samuel 12:23 show the importance of prayer?
3. How does Jeremiah 29:13 teach earnestness in prayer?
4. What does it mean to “ask, seek, and knock” in prayer?
5. How does Matthew 7:8 assure you of answers to your prayers?
6. What does Proverbs 15:8 say about God’s attitude toward your prayers?
7. Whose prayer will God hear?
8. How does Matthew 7:1 assure you of the nature of God’s answers?

9. How can you pray in the will of God?

10. What can you do this week to have a more effective prayer life?