

I invite you to open your bibles this morning to today's scripture text which can be found in Matthew, the 7th chapter, verses 1-12. We continue our series in the Sermon on the Mount. Where Jesus opens up his heart, and pours out his mind to us, his disciples. Jesus's teaching today covers a formula of love, within the golden rule, revealing the principle of prayer.

### Our Fathers Word Mt 7:1-12

1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

9 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 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! 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray, and when you're are tired of praying, pray some more. When you pause, and reflect for a moment; that God is infinitely strong, and can do all that he pleases. That God is infinitely *righteous* so that he only does what is right. That God is infinitely *good* so that everything he does is perfectly good. That God is infinitely *wise* so that he always knows perfectly what is right and what is good. That God is infinitely *loving* so that all of his strength and all of his righteousness and all of his goodness and all of his wisdom functions to raise the joy of his loved ones as high as it ***can be raised*** forever — when you pause to consider that; this God lavishly invites us to come and ask him for good things, with the promise that he will give good things to those who ask. It is breath taking and unimaginably wonderful.

It also means that one of the greatest tragedies in the church, is that there is so little a desire to pray. The greatest invitation in the world is extended to us, and we regularly turn away to other things. It's as though God created the greatest banquet imaginable, sent out free invitations to come and eat, and we sent back on our RSVP saying, "I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it," or, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go and see them first," or, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" as revealed Luke 14:18-20. Excuses, excuses, excuses. Amazing.

So, my prayer now, as we begin a new season of healing, a new season of growing our church family, of seeking God's will for our lives and for our church, is that God will take this message, this text of scripture from our Lord Jesus' mouth, and use it along with other things that he is going to bring into our lives, and awaken in our Church an unprecedented desire to pray for his will to be

done here in Pemberville, and in the community around us where he sends us. That there will be a unified will in our prayer life with God's will for the plan of our future. That the strength of our faith will be revealed in our prayer teams effectiveness, and in our prayer life in the privacy of our inner room, our cars, our cubicles, and, as families, as small groups, in prayer meetings, and in church. That this desire will rise up from within, a strong and irresistible desire to pray. I pray that God will pour out upon us, as Zachariah said he would, a spirit of prayer and pleas for mercy. A spirit of prayer and supplication, will be poured out upon our church.

If our real motive is to get through to God, He will hear, and He will answer. Our prayer life is the life line of survival, growth, and fellowship to our Father in Heaven who desires to have a personal relationship with each and every one of his children, with us.

God communicates with us through the Word of God, and through the Holy Spirit, but prayer is our communication with God. Because God is personal, all people can offer prayers. However, sinners who have not trusted Jesus Christ for their salvation, remain alienated from God. So, while unbelievers may pray, they do not have the basis for a rewarding fellowship with God. They have not met the conditions laid down in the Bible for effectiveness in prayer.

As Christians we recognize our dependence upon our Creator and our savior Jesus Christ. We have so many blessings that are poured out upon us each and every day that we have every reason to express our gratitude for God's gifts in our lives. But, we have *far more reason* to respond to God than this.

We respond to the love of God for us. God's love is revealed through the marvelous incarnation and life of Christ, His atoning provision at the Cross, His resurrection, as well as His continuing presence in our daily lives through the Holy Spirit.

Our prayer cannot be replaced by zealous, devout, good works in a needy world. As important as service and ministry is to others, we must at times, turn away from that, to God, in prayer. Prayer to our Father in Heaven, who works through all things, in all things, and over all things. We should not think of prayer as a mystical experience in which we lose our identity in the infinite reality of it all. For our prayer life to be effective, it must be a scripturally informed response, of our being saved, by grace to the living God who can *hear and answer* on the *basis* of **Christ's payment** of the penalty which we all, as sinners, deserved.

So, here's the approach. There are in this word from Jesus, from versus 7-11, in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, eight encouragements to pray. Eight of them, and we will walk through them, look in the text, how Jesus is saying, "Come pray, come pray, pray to my Father, pray to my Father!" These are his encouragements to pray, and we can hope that the cumulative effect will be if the first one doesn't awaken the desire to pray, that the second added one would. If the second doesn't, the third one added would. If the third doesn't the fourth would, and so on. By the time we get to the eighth there will be enough welling up from within us that we will cry out "ok Jesus I get it! I get it! You want me to pray! Yes, this is a great thing you have prepared for me." That's the first step, and the second will be for us to ask the question, "so what do these promises really mean?" "**Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**"

## **1. He Invites Us to Pray**

Three times he *invites* us to pray — or, you could say, if you will hear it lovingly, three times he *commands* us to pray — to ask him for what we need. It's the number of times that he invites us that gets our attention. Verses 7–8: “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*” The repetition is meant to say, “I mean this.” I want you to do this. Ask your Father for what you need. Seek your Father for the help you need. Knock on the door of your Father's house so he will open and give you what you need. Ask, seek, knock. I invite you *three times* because I really want you to enjoy your Father's help.

## **2. He Makes Promises to Us if We Pray**

Even better and more amazing than the three invitations are the seven promises. Verses 7–8: “Ask, and [1] *it will be given to you*; seek, and [2] *you will find*; knock, and [3] *it will be opened to you*. For everyone who asks [4] *receives*, and the one who seeks [5] *finds*, and to the one who knocks [6] *it will be opened*.” Then at the end of verse 11b (7): “How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Seven promises. It will be given you. You will find. It will be opened to you. The asker receives. The seeker finds. The knocker gets an open door. Your Father will give you good things. Surely the point of this lavish array of promises is to say to us: Be encouraged to come. Pray to him. It is not in vain that you pray. God is not toying with you. He answers. He gives good things when you pray. Be encouraged. Pray often, pray regularly, pray confidently in this season.

### ***3. God Makes Himself Available at Different Levels***

Jesus encourages us not only by the number of invitations and promises, but by the threefold variety of invitations. In other words, God stands ready to respond positively when you find him at different levels of accessibility.

Ask. Seek. Knock. If a child's father is present, he asks him for what he needs. If a child's father is somewhere in the house but not seen, he seeks his father for what he needs. If the child seeks and finds the father behind the closed door of his study, he knocks to get what he needs. The point seems to be that it doesn't matter whether you find God immediately close at hand, almost touchable with his nearness, or hard to see and even with barriers between, he will hear, and he will give good things to you because you looked to him and not another.

### ***4. Everyone Who Asks Receives***

Jesus encourages us to pray by making it explicit that everyone who asks receives, not just some. Verse 8: **“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”** When he adds the word *everyone* in verse 8, he wants us to overcome being timid, he wants us to overcome being hesitant. He wants us to stop thinking that somehow it will work for others, but not for us. Of course, he is talking about the children of God here, not all human beings. If we will not have Jesus as our Savior and God as our Father, then these promises don't apply to us.

John 1:12 says, **“To all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”** To become the child of God, we must receive the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who gives us the authority of adoption. That is who these promises are for.

For those who receive Jesus, *every one* of them who asks receives good things from his Father. The point is, that *none of his children* is excluded. **All** are welcome and urged to come.

Martin Luther saw the way Jesus is motivating here:

*“He knows that we are timid and shy, that we feel unworthy and unfit to present our needs to God... We think that God is so great and we are so tiny that we do not dare to pray... That is why Christ wants to lure us away from such timid thoughts, to remove our doubts, and to have us go ahead confidently and boldly.”* (The Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 21 of Luther’s Works)

### **5. We Are Coming to Our Father**

We have implied it, now let’s say it explicitly with its own force: When we come to God through Jesus, we are coming to our *Father*. Verse 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!”** *Father* was not a throw away label for Jesus. It is one of the greatest of all truths. God is our Father. The implication is that he will never, never give us what is bad for us. Never. He is our Father.

### **6. Our Heavenly Father Is Better than Our Earthly Father**

Then the Jesus encourages us to pray by showing us that our heavenly Father is better than our earthly father and will far more certainly give good things to us than they did. There is no evil in our heavenly Father like there is in our earthly father.

Verse 11 again: “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!”

We are aware, and Jesus was even more aware, that our earthly fathers are sinful. This is why the Bible repeatedly draws attention not only to the similarity between earthly fathers and the heavenly Father, but also to the differences. Heb 12:9-11 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Mt 5:48 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

So, Jesus goes beyond the encouragement of merely saying that God is your Father, and says that God is always better than your earthly father, because all earthly fathers are evil and God is not. Jesus is very blunt and unflattering here. This is a clear instance of Jesus’s belief in the universal sinfulness of human beings. He assumes that his disciples are all evil — he doesn’t choose a softer word (like *sinful*, or *weak*). He simply says that his disciples are evil (*ponēroi*).

Don’t ever limit your understanding of the Fatherhood of God to your experience of your own father. Rather, take heart that God has none of the sins or limitations or weaknesses or hang-ups of your father.

And the point Jesus makes is: Even fallen, sinful fathers usually have enough common grace to give good things to their children. There are terribly abusive fathers.

But in most places in the world, fathers are jealous for the good of their children, even when they are unclear about what is good for them. But God is always better. In him there is no evil. Therefore, the argument is strong: If your earthly father gave you good things (or even if he didn't!), how much more will your heavenly Father give good things — always good things to those who ask.

And there is something implicit here that underlines encouragement #4 above — the word *everyone* — “Everyone who asks receives.” If Jesus says to his disciples, “You are evil,” then the only people that can come to God in prayer are *evil* children of God. You are children of God. And you are evil. In other words, even after you are adopted by God into his family, sin remains in you. But Jesus says, *everyone* will receive — *every one* of God's *evil* children! We will see why in a moment.

#### **7. We Can Trust God's Goodness Because He Has Already Made Us His Children**

Here is another implicit encouragement to pray: God will give us good things *as* his children because he has already given us the gift to *become* his children.

This insight came from St. Augustine: “For what would he not now give to sons when they ask, when he has already granted this very thing, namely, that they might be sons?” We have already seen that being a son of God is a gift we receive when we come to Jesus (John 1:12). Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 8:42, “**If God were your Father, you would love me.**” But God is not their Father. They reject Jesus. So, not all are the sons of God. But if God has freely made us sons, how much more will he give us what we need?

## ***8. The Cross Is the Foundation of Prayer***

Finally, implicit in these words is the cross of Christ as the foundation for all the answers to our prayer. The reason I say this is because he calls us evil and yet he says we are children of God. How can it be that evil people are adopted by an all holy God? How can we presume to be children, let alone ask and expect to receive, and seek and expect to find, and knock and expect to have the door opened?

Jesus gave the answer several times. In Matthew 20:28, he said, **“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** He gave his life to ransom us from the wrath of God and put us in the position of children who only receive good things. And in Matthew 26:28, he said at the Last Supper, **“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** Because of Christ’s blood, our sins are forgiven when we trust in him. This is why even though Jesus calls us evil, we can be the children of God and count on him to give us good things when we ask him.

The death of Jesus is the foundation for all the promises of God and all the answers to prayer that we ever get. This is why we say “in Jesus’s name” at the end of our prayers. Everything depends on him.

The summary so far is that Jesus really means to encourage us to pray. Why else talk like this about prayer if his goal for us now is not that we pray. So, he gives us encouragement upon encouragement, at least eight of them.

**One final question:** How shall we understand these six promises in verses 7 and 8: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened”?

Does this mean that everything a child of God asks for he gets?

The context here is sufficient to answer this question. No, we do not get everything we ask for and we should not and we would not want to. The reason we should not is because we would in effect become God if God did everything we asked him to do. We should not be God. God should be God. And the reason that we would not want to get everything we asked is because we would then have to bear the burden of infinite wisdom which we do not have. We simply don't know enough to infallibly decide how every decision will turn out and what the next events in our lives, let alone in history, should be.

But the reason that we do not get all we ask is because the text implies this. Jesus says in verses 9–10 that a good father will not give his child a stone if he asks for bread, and will not give him a serpent if he asks for a fish. This illustration prompts us to ask, “What if the child asks for a serpent?” Does the text answer whether the Father in heaven will give it? Yes, it does. In verse 11, Jesus draws out this truth from the illustrations: Therefore, how much more will your Father give good things to those who ask him.

**He gives good things.** *Only* good things. He does not give serpents to children. Therefore, the text itself points away from the conclusion that *Ask and you will receive* means *Ask and you will receive the very thing you ask for when you ask for it in the way you ask for it*. It doesn't say that. And it doesn't mean that.

If we take the passage as a whole, it says that when we ask and seek and knock — when we pray as needy children looking away from our own resources to our trustworthy heavenly Father — he will hear and he will give us good things. Sometimes just *what* we asked. Sometimes just *when* we ask it. Sometimes just *the way* we desire. And other times he gives us something better, or at a time he knows is better, or in a way he knows is better.

And of course, this tests our faith. Because if we thought that something different were better, we would have asked for it in the first place. But we are not God. We are not infinitely strong, or infinitely righteous, or infinitely good, or infinitely wise, or infinitely loving. And therefore, it is a great mercy to us and to the world that we do not get all we ask.

But if we take Jesus at his word, Oh how much blessing we forfeit because we do not ask and seek and knock — blessings for ourselves, our families, our church, our nation, our world.

So, would you join me in a fresh new commitment to set aside time for prayer alone and in families and in groups.

We should be deeply, deeply thankful for the stability that is brought into our lives by embracing that sovereign goodness of the grace of God through prayer. That we have been enabled to weather some of the most horrific situations.

So, in conclusion, taken as a whole this passage means, as Jesus says here, “...come to my Father, and pray trusting me, that I am the foundation of everything here. Do not assume that the precise thing you ask for, when you ask for it, the way you want it, it’s going to happen. But always know, if it doesn’t happen the way you want it, *your prayer was not in vain.* “

Otherwise, this text is useless, this text means nothing, *if asking is pointless*, when you don't get what you ask for. What he says is, if you ask your Father, he will give good things. James says, "...we have not those good things, because we do not ask." Oh what do forfeit because we do not pray as believers in Christ. Good things we forfeit. That God would give, if we asked in prayer.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father I pray that throughout our church family, all of those present, and all of those we so dearly desire to have here with us and with you, on this weekend there will be welling up within us a fresh desire, a strong compelling desire, for us all to pray.

To pray in our inner rooms at home, pray in our cars, pray in our work space, to pray with our spouse, our children, with our friends, and co-workers,

To pray where ever we are, to be prayer warriors as a part of our prayer team,

To pray every morning and evening, every week of the year,

Oh God, pour out a spirit of prayer and supplication upon us,

We pray, in Jesus name

Amen.

