

Matthew 7:7-11

Petitioning God

(see apptoteach.org theology file #314)

Introduction

1. Prayer as petition is a vital part of Christian faith and it raises a number of questions.
 - a. Does God really need us to ask for what we need?
 - b. Life for many people seems to go quite well without prayer.
 - c. Our experience and observation is that many (maybe most) prayers seem to make little difference.
 - d. Do we really understand what petitioning God is all about?
2. Jesus addresses prayer in two places in the Sermon on the Mount.
 - a. In the first reference (6:5-15) He is concerned about using prayer as an outward show of piety (vs.6) and about meaningless repetition that is designed to manipulate God (vs.7-15).
 - b. In (7:7-11) He is concerned about our expectations and persistence.
3. What are we to expect when we pray? Is prayer to be supplemented with other activity if we are to see results?
4. According to a 1997 Newsweek Poll:
 - 82% say they ask for health or success for a child or family member when they pray.
 - 75% ask for strength to overcome personal weakness.
 - 87% say that God answers prayers.
 - 51% think God doesn't answer prayers to win sporting events.
 - 36% never pray for financial or career success.
 - 29% say they pray to God more than once a day.
 - 25% pray only once a day.
 - 82% say they believe that God does not play favorites in answering prayers.
 - 79% say God answers prayers for healing someone with an incurable disease.
 - 73% think prayers for help in finding a job are answered.
 - 54% say that when God doesn't answer their prayers, it means it wasn't God's will.
 - 82% don't turn away from God when prayers go unanswered.

A. Text Matthew 7

“⁷ Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. ⁹ Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask

him for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

B. Literary structure

1. A series of commands

“⁷ Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

2. A promise

⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

3. An analogy

⁹ Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

C. Observations

1. A series of commands

“⁷ Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.

- a. Are we to do more than ask? Jesus’ words suggest that prayer is not the only step in being blessed with “good gifts.”
- b. Seeking suggests a process of following up on our desire or passion with action. It would suggest that if there is no effort to pursue the gift it will not come.
- c. Knocking suggest assertive effort. This is another way of asking.

2. A promise

⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

- a. The promise is all-inclusive in that “everyone” is included with no hint of their spiritual or moral condition.
- b. The promise also indicates that the results are certain .
- c. One might be tempted to apply this to human relationships as in (7:1-5) but the analogy that follows suggests that our petitioning of God is in view.

3. An analogy

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- a. Jesus contrast the heart and actions of a human father (even an evil father) with that of a holy loving God to emphasize the certainty of God's promise.
- b. What constitutes "good gifts?" The parallel text in Luke 11:13 indicates that spiritual (not material) gifts are in view.
- c. Can we always see the "goodness" of God's gifts? Is it possible to perceive our gifts as "stones and serpents" when in reality they are the very "good things" we need for our spiritual wellbeing.

D. This teaching raises some puzzling questions.

1. **Why does our experience not illustrate this teaching?** Many of us are struck by how seldom our requests seem granted.
2. **Why does our observation of the experience of others not illustrate this teaching?** While there are many testimonies of answered prayer, no one can say that they received all that they ever asked for.
3. **Does this teaching apply to all and any request?** Can I expect to receive fame, fortune and other selfish goals through asking, seeking, and knocking?
4. **Do we really ask for good gifts or do we more often ask for stones and serpents?** If the good gifts are the things that nurture and develop within us a mature spiritual life, then we must expect something other than that which would hinder our development.
 - When Paul asks that he may know Christ and the fellowship of his suffering (Phil.3:10), is he not asking for something that most of us would never ask?
 - When Paul states that it is in his weakness that he finds God's strength (2 Cor.12:10), is he not asking for something that most of us would never ask?
 - When James tells us that we do not receive from God answers to our prayers because we are asking for fleshly wants (Jas.4:3), what does he mean?
5. **Paul's petitions give us an illustration of praying for "good gifts."**
 - **Ephesians 1** "15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, **may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.** 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."
 - **Ephesians 3** "14 For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 **that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of**

Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

E. Biblical Prayer Principles that can help us in our prayer.

1. Honesty

1 Pet.5:7 “casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you.”
Phil.4:6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

2. Humility

Lk.18:9-14 “the Pharisee and the Publican”

3. In The Name Of Christ

Jn.15:16 “whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.”

4. Righteousness

Jas.5:16 “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” Ps 66:18 “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

5. Unity

Matt.18:19 “if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done” 1 Pet.3:7 “live with your wives in an understanding way, . . . so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

6. Faith

Jas.1:5-8 “let him ask in faith without any doubting” Matt.21:21 “if you have faith, and do not doubt, . . . if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall.’”

7. Persistence

Lk.11:5-10 “the persistent friend”

8. According To His Will

1 Jn.5:14-15 “if we ask anything according to His will He hears us”

9. His Word In Us

Jn.15:7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.”

F. Lessons

- 1. God is eager to give His people “good gifts.”**
- 2. We may not know the difference between “good gifts” and those things that will not help us spiritually.**
- 3. Receiving “good gifts” is a process that may require persistence.**
- 4. As with much of the Sermon on the Mount we are dealing with hyperbole.**