

Matthew 7:7-11 – “A Philosophy of Prayer”

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Intro: Why does Jesus return so abruptly to the subject of prayer at this point in the Sermon? Hasn't He already taught us what we need to know about prayer in chapter 6:5-15? It certainly seemed like the model for prayer He gave us in those verses was satisfyingly complete! Did He feel like something had been left out? Did He think to Himself, “Oh yeah; I got to add one more thing I forgot earlier?” Hardly! Jesus here returned to the subject of prayer because it is about this time in His teaching that many of us would be saying, “Whew! What He's telling us seems so demanding, so out of our reach! Can it really be possible that normal people such as we are can ever live up to the demands of character and practice He is making of us?” So Jesus came back to the matter of prayer, not this time to give us a model of prayer as He did in chapter 6. Rather, this time His aim is to give us a philosophy of prayer – a foundation on which to secure our practice of prayer. In these verses Jesus shows us the attitudes of heart we should bring to bear when we go to God in prayer. What does prayer rest on? How do we know we're doing anything of value when we pray? Hang on! We're going to dive into that deep pool tonight when we learn that...

Proposition: God is a good, good Father to His children. You can count on Him for every good thing you lack.

Our plan of study tonight will focus around three thoughts: (vv.7-8) Prayer is the consistent confession of our neediness; (vv.9-10) God is a Good, Good Father; (v.11) Our Good Father gives us all things for good.

(vv.7-8) Prayer is the Consistent Confession of our Neediness – Jesus returned to the matter of prayer here because any normally attentive Christian should be feeling a little inadequate and overwhelmed at this point in the Sermon. If you don't feel that way, perhaps you haven't been paying attention! The high demands of character expressed in the beatitudes; the call to a higher righteousness than that of the most religious people you know; the forsaking of anger, lust, and retaliation; the call to love your enemies – Wow! Let's be real. If we're going to follow through on living up to Jesus' teaching, we're going to need more than a little help from on high! So Jesus comes to our rescue by giving us the foundation for a proper prayer life. The first attitude we must bring to prayer is expressed in verse 7 – We must come to God in consistent confession of our neediness. **Matthew 7:7 - 7** “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*” This verse give us a small primer in prayer, for here Jesus tells us three things we need to know if we would pray properly: Keep on asking; keep on seeking; keep on knocking. What is the meaning of these things?

- “Ask” = Humility of admitting our neediness before God. To ask is to admit that you don't have the resource you are asking for. No one should ask for what he already has. Asking is a kind of supplication. You are going to someone who has what you need and admitting frankly that you don't have what you are seeking. The one you are seeking this thing from might legitimately say “No,” just as well as “Yes.” You are in a position of humility – humbly asking for help with something you cannot provide for yourself. It is well known that the language of the text implies that one “keep on” asking. This humility of asking is not a one and done event. It goes on forever – a constant humbling of the self before God, admitting that we can't provide for ourselves the knowledge, strength, wisdom and resources we need to live as Christ calls us to live. This is the first foundation of prayer.
- “Seek” = Diligence in seeking help from God. Not only do we come with humility but we must also come with consistent diligence. It's not enough to simply show up and ask for the help we need. We must be in earnest. No half-hearted prayers reach through the veil and into the

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presence. Are we serious about the thing we are seeking? Does it matter to us if our friends are reached; our children are corrected; our community is healed? Are we just going through the motions when we bring our requests to God or are we in dead earnest? The picture here is of someone seeking for a lost coin, a lost sheep or a lost son. Sound familiar? And this earnestness is also continuous, just as asking is continuous. Is our earnestness in prayer a habit of prayer? Earnest continual seeking is the second foundation of prayer.

- “Knock” = Persistence in seeking help from God. “*Pray without ceasing*” is more than a slogan – it’s a way of life. Our prayer lives never come to an end, at least here on earth. Prayer is the never ending, never finished, never satisfied task of the believer. God answers prayer, and when He has answered one prayer, there will inevitably be one more to offer. And sometimes God’s answers to our prayers seem agonizingly slow in coming! What to do? Keep praying. Remember Jesus’ illustration of the importunate widow and the neighbor needing bread for a late arriving traveler. Persistence is the third foundation of prayer.

These foundations of prayer rest on a deeper substrata; they go down to bedrock itself – the absolutely unconditional promise that God will answer these kinds of prayer. **Matthew 7:8 - 8** *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.* Consider for a moment the absolutely astounding nature of this promise. EVERYONE who asks, receives. EVERYONE who seeks, finds. EVERYONE who knocks find an open door. Note well that the language here is unconditional. What can this mean? One thing it doesn’t mean is that we will automatically receive everything we think of asking for in prayer. If it doesn’t mean that, what then does it mean? It means that we can rely upon God’s steadfast goodness toward us.¹ God will ALWAYS answer our prayers according to what is in our best interest and in His best plan for His world and our lives. This is not *carte blanche* guarantee that we will receive everything we wish for; but it is a rock-solid guarantee that we will receive everything God knows is ultimately good for us. What a tremendous guarantee! If we really believe this, how can we neglect asking, seeking and knocking?

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The foundation of our prayer life is a consistent confession of our need in response to a bedrock commitment from God to answer our prayers.

[ILLUSTRATION] It is common practice when purchasing a new car to make sure you have insurance on the vehicle before driving it off the car lot. It isn’t that you couldn’t drive the car away without insurance; it’s that you feel a greater confidence to take it out in traffic knowing that your insurance company guarantees the protection of your investment once you put it on the road. Many of us wouldn’t think of risking our most valuable possessions unless we can be sure that someone is willing to stand good against their loss. In that same way, the guarantee that God will always answer our prayers in the way that is best for us gives us confidence to keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking in the face of life’s most uncertain hours.

[APPLICATION] Humble, diligent persistence in prayer is the proper response of the believing heart to the ironclad promise of God to answer every prayer in the way that is best. The promise is a guarantee that gives us comfort, no matter the urgency of the need we are facing. Since God has unconditionally promised to do what is best for us in response to our prayers, we should have confidence to boldly

¹ Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

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come into His presence, knowing that ultimately, we are risking nothing and receiving everything no matter the issue’s outcome. God is faithful. He will do what is best, and we can rest in that truth.

(vv.9-10) God is a Good, Good Father – Jesus turned to an example from life to demonstrate the absolute reliability of God’s commitment to answer our prayers. In these verses He spoke of the willingness of a merely human father to provide good things for his son. **Matthew 7:9–10 - 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?* Jesus again turned to an argument from lesser to greater to illustrate His point: if mere human fathers love their children so much that in spite of their sinful nature, they consistently give their children the good things needed for a healthy life, could it possibly be the case that our heavenly Father would withhold any good thing from the children He loves? Verse 11 makes this point: **Matthew 7:11 - 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!* When Jesus calls us, “*You who are evil,*” He is acknowledging the fact of our sinful natures, even though we have been redeemed by His precious blood. If even the old nature cannot thwart the power of paternal love in sinful humanity, how could it possibly be that our heavenly Father, who is greater than all, would withhold any good things from those He loves? Can anything keep the all powerful, all loving, all knowing God from keeping His promise to answer the prayers of His beloved children? The very idea is ridiculous.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] We can count on God’s answers to our prayers because He is the best of Fathers to His children.

[ILLUSTRATION] What would you do for love of your beloved? Would any expense be too great to buy their freedom? Would any gift be too costly to prove your affection? Would any suffering be beyond the pale to bear if you could keep your beloved wife, husband, child or parent from misery and poverty? I think most of us would agree; love is the greatest motivator for self-sacrifice.

[APPLICATION] Why then, would we doubt God’s promise to answer our prayers every time in the way that is best for us? The only answer must be that we don’t yet realize that He is our Father and that He loves us unconditionally. Our mistrust of God’s goodness when the answer to our earnest prayers seems to be silence, or perhaps even, “No,” reveals something of our own heart’s insecurities. Do we really understand that God is our Father? Do we really know that His love compels Him always to do what is best for us? Our loving heavenly Father will never turn His back on us, ignoring our prayers. He may not give us all that we ask; but when He chooses not to, it isn’t because He is unfaithful. It’s because we ask amiss.

(v.11) Our Father Gives Us All Things for Good – It is instructive to observe what Jesus had in mind when He said, *how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*² What good things could Jesus have had in mind? Comparing the parallel passage in Luke 11:13 we find an answer: 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!*³ This is one of the most significant verses on prayer in the New Testament. We may not get what we want, but we will always get what is highest and best for us: the help and strengthening of the Holy Spirit. It is often overlooked that the greatest reward of prayer is the strengthening, help and comfort we receive through the gift of the Spirit

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 7:11). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 11:13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

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in answer to believing prayer. Is it too much to say, that if we received nothing else because we have prayed, this would be enough? Think for a moment. How often have you been strengthened in your spirit because you prayed? How many times have you received comfort from the Spirit simply because you have prayed? How many times has encouragement come to your soul, simply because you went to God in prayer? We can count on this: Our good, good Father, who knows better than we do all that we need, will strengthen, help and encourage us with His Spirit when we ask, seek and knock, because all we really need is the gift of Himself.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] In answer to our prayers, our good, good Father gives us all things for our good when He gives us himself.

[ILLUSTRATION] When you were a child did you ever receive a gift for Christmas or a birthday, that was unexpectedly better than what you had asked for? That sometimes happens, you know. A loving parent, understanding the needs and heart of a child better than the child himself, gives to the beloved little one the perfect gift: perfectly suited to the need; perfectly positioned to delight; and perfectly unexpected until it is unwrapped. In this same way, the surprising answer God has gift wrapped for every believer's prayer is the gift of God Himself – His Holy Spirit.

[APPLICATION] It is through our prayer life that the awesome presence and power of the Holy Spirit is released into our lives. Ironically, some believers do not seem to sense the need for much prayer. A few quick moments in the morning if time permits. Never a thought for gathered prayer with the people of God. Perhaps just a recited “quicky” at night before closing the eyes to sleep. Such people are cutting themselves off from one of the greatest means God has given His people to get to know Him personally. Dear ones, prayer is about much more than asking and receiving resources. Prayer is our invitation to come into the presence of the One who made us and know Him for who He is. The gift of the Spirit is the greatest answer to believing prayer a man or woman can ever receive.

Conclusion: So what is our philosophy of prayer? What have we learned tonight? We have learned first of all that the basis of prayer is the consistent confession of our need in response to the unconditional promise of God to answer our prayer. We have learned that the promise of God to answer cannot possibly fail, because our good, good Father loves us relentlessly. We have learned that the greatest answer to prayer is the gift of God Himself to each one who prays. Armed with these understandings, how can we ever take prayer lightly again? How could we despair of receiving help to live as Christ calls us to in this world?