

Matthew 7:9-11 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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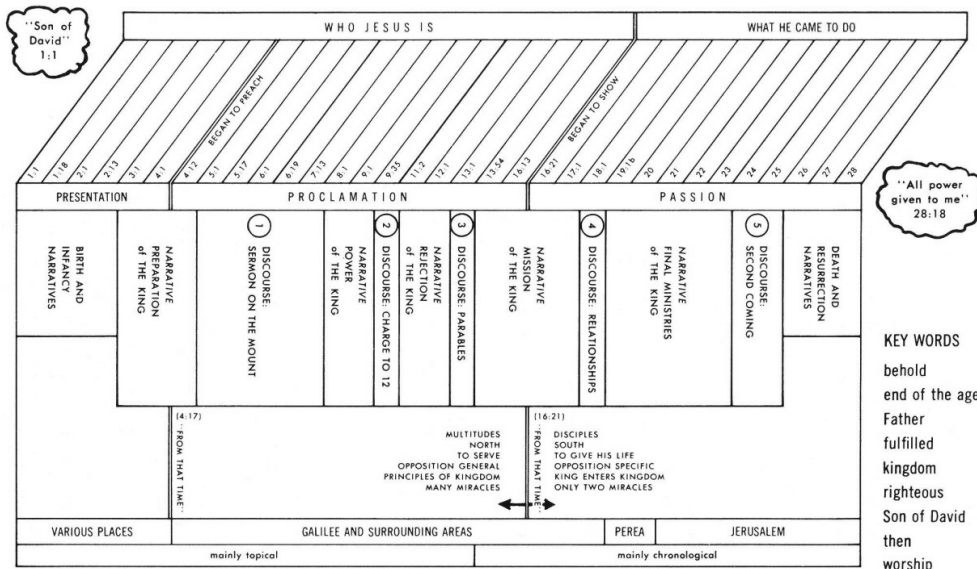
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MATTHEW CONTAINS 15 PARABLES 20 MIRACLES

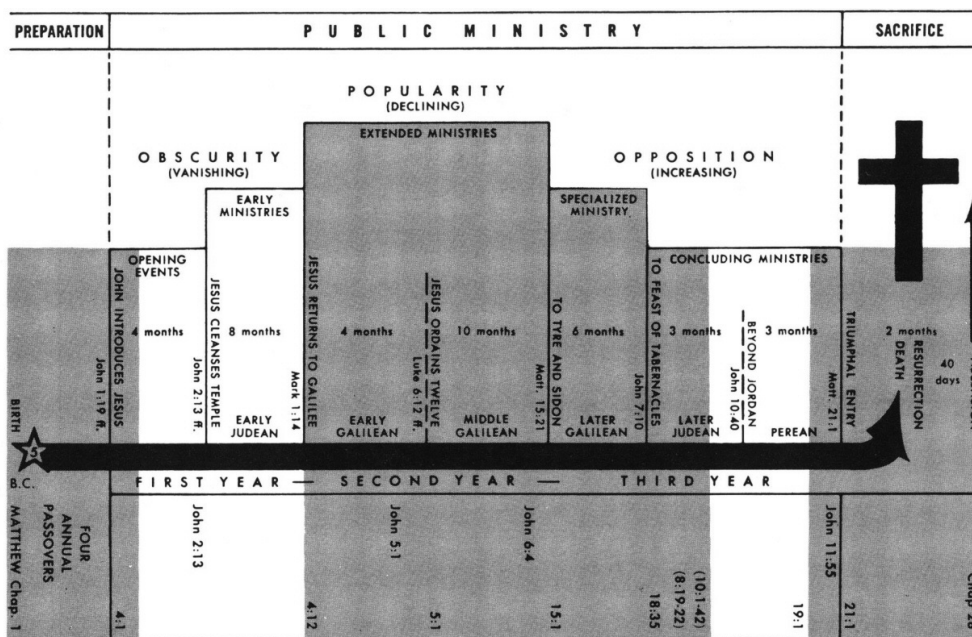
KEY VERSES: 1:1 "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

2:2 "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."



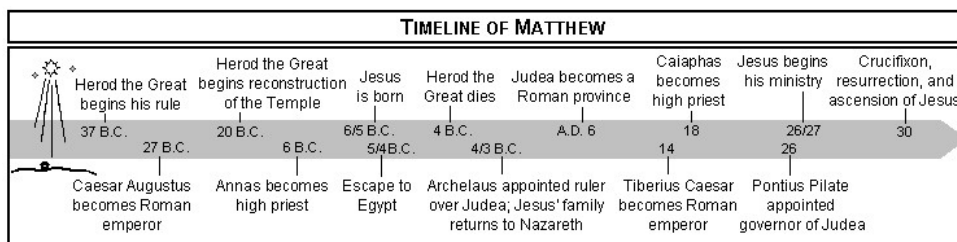
Click chart to enlarge
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Chart from Charles Swindoll

THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY MATTHEW (shaded area)



Click chart to enlarge

Jesus Birth and Early Years
Leading up to the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 1-7



Source: Ryrie Study Bible

Greek: [e tis estin](#) (3SPAI) ex [humon anthropos. on aitesei](#) (3SFAI) [o huios autou arton me lithon epidosei](#) (3SFAI) [auto](#)

Amplified: Or what man is there of you, if his son asks him for a loaf of bread, will hand him a stone? ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

KJV: Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

NLT: You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: "If any of you were asked by his son for bread would you be likely to give him a stone ([New Testament in Modern English](#))

Wuest: Or, who is there of you, a man, who, should his son ask for a loaf of bread; he will not give him a stone, will he?

Young's: 'Or what man is of you, of whom, if his son may ask a loaf -- a stone will he present to him?

Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?:[e tis estin](#) (3SPAI) ex [humon anthropos, on aitesei](#) (3SFAI) [o huios autou arton me lithon epidosei](#) (3SFAI) [auto](#)

- Luke 11:11, 12, 13-note
- [Matthew 7 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

What man is there among you...will give him a stone? - Obviously a father does not give that which is harmful to a child, but rather that which will be for good. Keep in mind that is this comparison, human parents are only a *faint* picture of the our Father's heart. He delights to give His children those things which are for their good and what will be for their lasting profit. Prayer is the appointed means whereby these mercies are received. Are you availing yourself of the good treasures your Father in Heaven longs to pour out on you? If not than begin to pray today, not to get, but to be more like Jesus, Who during His life continually sought His Father's provision. If Jesus the Perfect Man had to do it, how much more do we as redeemed sinners need to do it?!

Spurgeon writes "Our Lord will give us the real thing. Sometimes we should be quite satisfied with the imitation of it. And sometimes we have to wait and be prepared for the reception of the real thing; it is infinitely better for us to wait for months than immediately to get ,a stone; better to wait for a fish than the next moment to have a scorpion. There were some in the wilderness who asked to be satisfied, and they were so, with the flesh of quails. They got their stones, they got their scorpions. But the Lord's people may sometimes find that they have to wait a while. ,God will not give to them that which is other than good for them."

Spurgeon adds this note on **stone** - "There were many stones in those days that were in appearance wonderfully like the bread which they used in the East; but would any father mock his son by giving him one of those stones to break his teeth on, instead of bread that he could eat? Never."

E M Bounds tells of an encouraging story of a praying son of the Most High who asked specifically "for a loaf" and did not receive "a stone"... "

Some years ago the record of a wonderful work of grace in connection with one of the stations of the China Inland Mission attracted a good deal of attention. Both the number and spiritual character of the converts had been far greater than at other stations where the consecration of the missionaries had been just as great.

This rich harvest of souls remained a mystery until Hudson Taylor, on a visit to England, discovered the secret. At the close of one of his addresses a gentleman came forward to make his acquaintance. In the conversation which followed, Mr. Taylor was surprised at the accurate knowledge the man possessed concerning this China Inland Mission station.

"But how is it," Mr. Taylor asked, "that you are so conversant with the conditions of that work?"

"Oh!" he replied, "the missionary there and I are old college mates; for years we have regularly corresponded; he has sent me names of enquirers and converts, and these I have daily taken to God in prayer."

At last the secret was found — a praying man, praying definitely, praying daily.& (E. M. Bounds, Purpose in Prayer) (You can join the company of men like him - add the following resource to your morning discipline and you will be eternally grateful - [Global Prayer Digest](#) - pray daily for the unreached peoples and one day you will meet the fruit of your "asking, seeking and knocking" labor in heaven even as has this old English saint!)

A Stone Or Bread?- No loving father would give a stone or a snake to his hungry son if he asked for a piece of bread or a fish. Jesus used the absurdity of that analogy in Matthew 7 to underscore the heavenly Father's readiness to give good things to His children when they ask Him. He wanted them to have complete confidence in the Father's provision for their spiritual needs. Sometimes, however, it may seem as if the Lord has given us "stones" instead of "bread." But in His wisdom, He actually is working through our circumstances to give us something far better than what we requested. An unknown author expressed it this way:

I asked for health that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked God for strength that I might achieve;
I was made weak that I might learn to obey.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power and the praise of men;
I was given weakness to sense my need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing I asked for but everything I hoped for;
In spite of myself, my prayers were answered—
I am among all men most richly blessed.
Yes, God always gives us what's best for us.

R De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**We may ask amiss,
but God answers aright.**

Confident Prayer - As one of Africa's first explorers, David Livingstone loved its people and longed to see them evangelized. His journals reveal his spiritual concern and deep faith. In late March 1872, he wrote, "He will keep His word--the gracious One, full of grace and truth--no doubt of it. He said, 'Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out' and 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will give it.' He will keep His word; then I can come and humbly present my petition, and it will be all right. Doubt is here inadmissible, surely." Livingstone had rock-like confidence in the Father's promises. In our praying we too can exercise the trust that God will not deny our requests when they are in keeping with His will. (By the way, are we reading His Word so that we know His will?) We can defeat doubt when we remind ourselves that no matter what happens in life, He cares deeply about us and longs to give us the wisdom to handle what comes our way (1 Pet. 5:7; Jas. 1:5). Our faith will grow stronger as we realize that our heavenly Father is gracious, delighting to give good gifts to His children (Mt. 7:11). Humbly but confidently, we can come to Him with our requests. --V C Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring,
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much. --Newton

**When we love God as our Father,
we won't treat Him as our servant.**

Keeping Track Of Prayers - Shortly before Margaret Koster died in 1997, I wrote an article about her, telling of her diligence in prayer. Despite her age, she set an example of faithfulness in prayer—continuing to spend hours each day speaking with the Lord she loved. Now she's reaping the rewards of that faithfulness. But there's another story about Margaret that needs to be told—a story of how seriously she took her prayer-life. When she was younger, Margaret would pray each day for missionaries she knew about. She also kept a journal of her prayers—complete with answers. One time when one of "her" missionaries was home from his overseas ministry, Margaret approached him, showed him her journal, and said, "I have recorded every prayer request you made as a missionary. And I have put down every answer that I know of. But I also have some prayers for which I don't know the answers.

You need to sit down with me and tell me how God answered those prayers so I can write them down."

Now that's taking prayer seriously! We learn from Margaret not only the importance of prayer but also the reality of God's answers. Remember, "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). —Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

We must call on the Lord with reverence,
When we go to Him in prayer;
In His time He will send the answers
To show us His love and care. —Fitzhugh

**If we take God seriously
we'll be serious about prayer.**

In John Piper's book **Desiring God** he explains why more Christians are not asking, seeking, knocking writing that...

Unless I'm badly mistaken, one of the main reasons so many of God's children don't have a significant life of prayer is not so much that we don't want to, but that we don't plan to. If you want to take a four-week vacation, you don't just get up one summer morning and say, "Hey, let's go today!" You won't have anything ready. You won't know where to go. Nothing has been planned.

But that is how many of us treat prayer. We get up day after day and realize that significant times of prayer should be part of our life, but nothing's ever ready. We don't know where to go. Nothing has been planned. No time. No place. No procedure. And we all know that the opposite of planning is not a wonderful flow of deep, spontaneous experiences in prayer. The opposite of planning is the rut. If you don't plan a vacation you will probably stay home and watch TV!

**The natural unplanned flow of spiritual life
sinks to the lowest ebb of vitality.**

There is a race to be run and a fight to be fought. If you want renewal in your life of prayer you must plan to see it.

Therefore, my simple exhortation is this: Let us take time this very day to rethink our priorities and how prayer fits in. Make some new resolve. Try some new venture with God. Set a time. Set a place. Choose a portion of Scripture to guide you. Don't be tyrannized by the press of busy days. We all need mid-course corrections. Make this a day of turning to prayer — for the glory of God and for the fullness of your joy.& (Available online - [Desiring God - Meditations of A Christian Hedonist](#)) (Bolding added)

Other Resources Related to Prayer:

- [Colossians 1:9 Commentary](#)
- [Colossians 4:12 Commentary](#)
- [Devotional on Prayer](#)
- [Guide to Praying for Missionaries](#)
- [Pithy Prayer Phrases](#)
- [Prayer - Greek Words for Prayer](#)
- [Prayer Devotionals and Illustrations](#)
- [Prayer Hymns and Poems](#)
- [Prayer Quotes](#)
- [Praying in the Spirit](#)
- [Spurgeon's Gems on Prayer](#)

Matthew 7:10 "**Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?**" ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [e kai ichthun aitesei](#) (3SFAI) [me ophin epidosei](#) (3SFAI) [auto?](#)

Amplified: Or if he asks for a fish, will hand him a serpent? ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

KJV: Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

NLT: Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! [NLT - Tyndale House](#)

Phillips: or if he asks for a fish would you give him a snake? [New Testament in Modern English](#)

Wuest: Or, should he also ask for a fish; he will not give him a snake, will he? [Eerdmans](#)

Young's: 'and if a fish he may ask -- a serpent will he present to him?

Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?: [e kai ichthun aitesei \(3SFAI\) me ophin epidosei \(3SFAI\) auto?](#)

See notes on Luke 11:11.

Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?- This expects a negative answer.

Spurgeon - The point is, not only that God gives, but that he knows how to give. If he were always to give according to our prayers, it might be very injurious to us. He might give us that with which we could do hurt, as when a father should put a stone into a boy's hand; or he might give us that which might do us hurt, as if a father were to give his child a serpent. He will do neither of these things; but he will answer us in discretion, and with prudence will he fulfill our desires. You know how to give to your children; how much more shall your infinitely-wise Father, who from heaven sees all the surroundings of men, give good things to them that ask him? (Exposition)

If your child asks for a stone or a snake, will you give it to him? No, no matter how much he begs. Children often ask for foolish things, which are withheld. The same is true with our heavenly Father. As ignorant, willful children we often ask for things that to us seem like fish or bread but which God knows will have the effect (figuratively of course) of a stone or a snake in our lives. Our Heavenly Father says no, not because He hates us but because he loves us. God's "No" is a sure sign of His wisdom and His love for us. If a five-year-old asks to play with a sharp knife, most reasonable fathers would respond with a definitive "No" and even let him cry and pout. His tears only show his immaturity. And frankly, if the father does give him the knife, it shows he doesn't really love him at all. In the same way, as God's children, believers often ask for things that might bring us harm, including even things we think are good, like a new job, a better salary, a new house, etc. But God Who Alone knows the beginning from the end, sees through to the end and knows that what we have asked for would harm us more than help us. So in His omniscient, loving wisdom He says "No".

Matthew 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: [ei oun humeis poneroi ontes \(PAPMPN\) oidate \(2SRAI\) domata agatha didonai \(PAN\) tois teknois humon, poso mallon o pater humon o en tois ouranois dosei \(3SFAI\) agatha tois aitousin \(PAPMPD\) auton.](#)

Amplified: If you then, evil as you are, know how to give good and advantageous gifts to your children, how much more will your Father Who is in heaven [perfect as He is] give good and advantageous things to those who keep on asking Him! [\(Amplified Bible - Lockman\)](#)

KJV: 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?

NLT: 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. [\(NLT - Tyndale House\)](#)

Phillips: If you then, for all your evil, quite naturally give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him?" [\(New Testament in Modern English\)](#)

Wuest: Therefore, as for you, in view of the fact that though being those who are evil, actively opposed to that which is good, you know how to be constantly giving good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him for them?

Young's: if, therefore, ye being evil, have known good gifts to give to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in the heavens give good things to those asking him?

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!: ei oun humeis poneroi ontes (PAPMPN) oidate (2SRAI) domata agatha didonai (PAN) tois teknois humon, poso mallon o pater humon o en tois ouranois dosei (3SFAI) agatha tois aitousin (PAPMPD) auton.

- Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Job 15:16; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9,19; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 2:1, 2, 3; Titus 3:3
- Ex 34:6,7; 2 Sa 7:19; Ps 86:5,15; 103:11, 12, 13; Isa 49:15; 55:8,9; Hos 11:8,9; Mic 7:18; Mal 1:6; Lk 11:11, 12, 13; Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8, 9, 10; 8:32; Eph 2:4,5; 1 Jn 3:1; 4:10
- Ps 84:11; 85:12; Jeremiah 33:14; Hosea 14:2; Luke 2:10,11; 11:13; 2Corinthians 9:8-15; Titus 3:4, 5, 6, 7
- [Matthew 7 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THOU ART COMING TO A KING LARGE PETITIONS WITH THEE BRING!

Spurgeon asks "Is there a connection between this conduct on our part and answers to our prayer? Undoubtedly it is so from the position of the text. If we will never grant the requests of those who need our help, in oases where we should expect to be ourselves helped, how can we go to God with any confidence, and ask him to help us? I doubt not that many a man has received no answer to his prayer because that prayer has come out of a heart hard and untender, which would not permit him to grant the requests of others. O child of God, do thou to others as thou wouldst that they should do to thee, then canst thou go to thy God in prayer with the confidence that he will hear and answer thee!"

Being (1510) (eimi) means to be and is the usual verb of existence. In this case the **present tense** indicates that evil is our nature! Evil is a stark description of our fundamental human condition.

Evil (4190) (poneros from ponos = labor, sorrow, pain) means evil in active opposition to good. The point Jesus makes is striking. Even earthly parents who are evil in the sense of being actively opposed to good, are still predisposed to constantly be giving good gifts to their children. That being the case, how much more willing is the perfect Father give good gifts to those who keep asking Him!

Know (1492) (eido) means in general to know by perception and is distinguished from **ginosko** because **ginosko** generally refers to knowledge obtained by experience. **Eido/oida** is a perception, a being aware of, an understanding, an intuitive knowledge which in the case of believers can only be given by the Holy Spirit. However in this context Jesus refers to that knowledge is available to all men. And so all men have an "absolute knowledge" (that which is without a doubt) of how to give good gifts to their children.

Good gifts - Good fathers are eager to help their children and give good gifts to their children. In Luke's parallel description, Jesus substitutes "the Holy Spirit" for Matthew's "good gifts." (See explanatory note on Luke 11:13)

Good (18) (agathos) means intrinsically good, inherently good in quality and also conveying the sense of good which is profitable, useful, beneficial or benevolent (marked by or disposed to doing good). As an aside, as father of 4 children, I wonder how often my gifts to them have truly been **agathos**? I fear too often I **indulged** them, which was not good!

If you then...how much more - Jesus use of "**much more**" is what is referred to as an argument from the **lesser to the greater** ([a fortiori argument](#)) = *draws upon existing confidence in a proposition to argue in favor of a second proposition that is held to be implicit in the first*, in this case from the **human** to the **divine**. If it is true of the lesser, **how much more** of the greater. God is our Father, our **Abba**, our Dear Father! Think of our earthly fathers at their very best and multiply that by infinity, and you have it (Dads, are you as convicted as I am?) As fathers, few of us are perfect, but even the most imperfect of us are usually able to love our children. But there is a perfect Father Who is perfect love and so is much greater than we are. His heart is pure and good and His love knows no bounds. Isaiah records our Father's words (He is speaking to Israel but the principle applies to believers)... :

"Can the mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! (Isaiah 49:15) (See post ["Inscribed on His Hands"](#))"

And so our Heavenly Father bids us come to Him in prayer. He never errs and never makes mistakes as do even the best of earthly fathers. That is the real meaning of the phrase "**how much more**." God knows **much more** than we do. God cares **much more** than we care. He is much richer than we are and **He is far more willing to answer our prayers than we are to have them answered**. And we know that our Father loves us because He gave His own Son to die for us even when we were His enemies. If He has already given us the best gift He could possibly give to mankind, will He refuse us any **good** (**agathos** is a crucial modifier!) thing we ask of Him? The Cross proves that the heart of God is good and that He gives good gifts because He gave the best on Calvary. So it is our holy privilege to come to that same good heart every time we pray.

To those who ask Him - Note the final phrase "**to those who ask Him.**" We should expect God to answer our prayers and we can expect nothing without prayer. In the deepest, most profound sense God's blessings are "limited" to those who ask for them. He will not give if we do not ask. The gates of heaven open to those who pray. Those same gates are closed to everyone else. In fact only believers can call Him their Father. Unbelievers are not in the family of God because they are still in Adam (unredeemed sinners) and not by grace through faith in Christ (redeemed sinners).

Carson reasons that "What is fundamentally at stake is man's picture of God. God must not be thought of as a reluctant stranger who can be cajoled or bullied into bestowing his gifts (Mt 6:7-8), as a malicious tyrant who takes vicious glee in the tricks he plays (Mt 7:9-10), or even as an indulgent grandfather who provides everything requested of him. He is the heavenly Father, the God of the kingdom, Who graciously and willingly bestows the **good gifts** of the kingdom in answer to prayer." ([Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7: 1982, Baker Pub Group](#))

Now be sure that your reading of these comments issues in action (pray!) for as someone once said, "*Any discussion of the doctrine of prayer that does not issue in the practice of prayer is not only not helpful, but harmful.*"

Let me encourage you to take three and one half minutes to read (and sing or read along as [Matt Foreman](#) sings) John Newton's words, especially "Thou art coming to a King, Large petitions with thee bring."

Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare

([Listen to a beautiful vocal by Matt Foreman](#) - it will move you deeply!)

by John Newton

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare:
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He Himself has bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay;
Therefore will not say thee nay.

**Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;**
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much;
None can ever ask too much.

With my burden I begin:
Lord, remove this load of sin;
Let Thy blood, for sinners spilt,
Set my conscience free from guilt;
Set my conscience free from guilt.

Lord, I come to Thee for rest,
Take possession of my breast;
There Thy blood bought right maintain,
And without a rival reign;
And without a rival reign.

As the image in the glass
Answers the beholder's face;
Thus unto my heart appear,
Print Thine own resemblance there;
Print Thine own resemblance there.

While I am a pilgrim here,
Let Thy love my spirit cheer;
As my Guide, my Guard, my Friend,
Lead me to my journey's end;
Lead me to my journey's end.

Show me what I have to do,
Every hour my strength renew:
Let me live a life of faith,
Let me die Thy people's death;
Let me die Thy people's death.

J R Miller ([Who Is He?](#)) - Good Things from God

"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" Matthew 7:11

No father will answer his hungry child's cry for bread with a stone, or give the child a serpent if he asks for a fish. Even sinful parents have in their hearts something of the image of God's own fatherhood. The argument is from the less to the greater. If a true earthly father, with all his imperfection, will not mock a child's cry, but will respond lovingly, how much more will our Father in heaven do for us? **"How much more?"** is a question none can answer. We can only say as **much more** as the heavenly Father is more loving, and wiser, and more able to give, than is the earthly father. Yet we must explain this promise also by other scriptures. The gate of prayer is set very wide open in this verse, yet those who would enter must come in the right way and seek **"good"** things. **While no one who asks for bread will receive a stone, neither will one who asks for a stone receive a stone. And many times do we come to God pleading with Him to let us have a stone.** Of course we imagine it is bread, and that it will be food to us. It is some earthly thing, some gift of honor or pleasure, some achievement of ambition, some object of heart desire. It looks like bread to our deluded vision. But God knows it is only a cold stone, that it would leave us starving if we were to receive it; and He loves us too well to listen to our piteous cries for it, or to be moved by our earnestness or our tears to give it to us. When we ask for a stone He will give us bread. **Thus it is that many requests for earthly things are not granted.** Yet the prayers are not unanswered. Instead of the stone we wish, God gives us the bread we need. We do not always know what is bread and what is a stone, and we must leave to God the final decision in all our prayers.

GOD'S READINESS TO GIVE HIS HOLY SPIRIT Mt 7:9-11 Charles Simeon

TO argue from ourselves to the Deity, and to conclude that, because we should do, or forbear any particular thing, he would do the same, is, in many cases, extremely fallacious; because many things may be proper as a rule of our conduct towards others, which can in no respect be applied to the moral Governor of the universe. There are, however, some instances wherein such an argument may be urged, not only with propriety, but with great effect. Such an instance occurs in the passage we have now read; in considering which, we shall,

I. Point out the force of our Lord's appeal—

Our Lord addresses himself both to our feelings and our judgment—

[Men who cannot understand a logical deduction, may comprehend, without any difficulty, the argument before us. Every one, whether he be a parent or not, knows sufficiently the feelings of a parent, to answer the question here put to him. We can scarcely conceive that any father should so divest himself of all the sensibilities of his nature, as to refuse a piece of bread to his child. Much less can we imagine, that he should mock his child, by offering him a stone; or give him, instead of necessary food, a serpent or scorpion to destroy him. Who then would think of ascribing such a disposition to God? God is the common parent of all his creatures; and he well knows that his Spirit is as necessary for the imparting and maintaining of spiritual life, as bread is for the support of our natural life. Will he then refuse that blessing to us, when we ask it at his hands; and leave us to perish without affording us the needful succour? It may happen, that an earthly parent may be indisposed, by passion or caprice, to do what is right; or he may be disabled through poverty: but there are no such impediments on the part of God, since he is subject to no infirmities; nor is there any thing impossible with him. We may be sure therefore that he will at all times act worthy of the relation which he bears to his creatures.]

But the force of the appeal lies in the contrast between God and us—

[At first sight the appeal may seem inconclusive, since our children have a claim upon us, but we have none on God; and the gift of

a piece of bread bears no proportion whatever to the unspeakable gift of God's Spirit. But it must be considered that we are "evil," so evil as to be capable of the greatest cruelties even towards our own children. Instances have occurred, wherein parents have not only murdered, but even eaten, their own offspring & the treating of them with extreme harshness and severity is no uncommon failing. Yet, with all our proneness to evil, and our readiness, under the influence of passion or temptation, to commit the greatest enormities, there cannot be found a person on earth so depraved, as to act towards his children, in the general tenour of his conduct, in the manner stated by our Lord. But God, on the contrary, is good, supremely, and only good, and therefore incapable of doing any thing, which may in the smallest degree impeach his character. Besides, he has manifested his goodness in that most unparalleled act of mercy, the gift of his own Son; the gift of his own Son to die for us; and that too unasked; and at a time when we were in rebellion against him; and when he knew the treatment which his Son would meet with from an ungrateful world: will he then refuse us any thing? Will he not give us his holy Spirit, when we ask it at his hands & when he knows that the bestowing of that gift will infallibly terminate in his own eternal glory? It is in this very light that an inspired Apostle states the same argument & and therefore we may be well assured, that it is unanswerably conclusive.]

That we may not however rest in a mere acknowledgment of this truth, we shall,

II. Suggest a suitable improvement of it—

Though the great scope of the text relates only to the prospect which we have of receiving answers to prayer,

We may learn from it,

1. In what light we are to regard God, when we come to a throne of grace—

[Men in general either think of God as a Being that has no concern about this lower world, or as a harsh master, and a severe judge. Accordingly their prayers are either a mere lip-service, in which they themselves feel no interest; or the supplications of a slave under the apprehension of the lash. But we should rather go to him as a Father; we should consider him as a Being able and willing to succour us, yea, infinitely more willing to give than we are to ask. How endearing is that address which we are taught to use, "Our Father, which art in heaven!" If we could approach him with the familiarity, and confidence, of dutiful and beloved children, how sweet would be our fellowship with him, and how successful our petitions! Then, nothing would appear too much to ask, nothing too trifling to lay before him. We should spread before him our every want; and experience, on all occasions, his condescension and grace.]

2. What we ought principally to desire in all our addresses to him—

[The leading subjects of men's petitions usually are; that their sins may be pardoned, and their ways reformed: and certainly these are important subjects for our supplications. But the offices of the Holy Spirit are very much overlooked even by the saints themselves: and though God will not altogether withhold his blessings, because we do not ask for them in the best manner, yet certainly it is of importance that we should feel our need of his Spirit, and express those feelings in our petitions to him. We cannot repent or pray, unless God, "pour out upon us a Spirit of grace and of supplication." We cannot know either our disease or our remedy, unless the Spirit be given to us "to convince us of our in-dwelling sin, and of the Saviour's righteousness." It is the Spirit's office "to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and shew them unto us." If we would "mortify the deeds of the body, it must be through the Spirit's" influence: if we would bring forth the fruits of righteousness, it must be through the operation of the same Spirit, whose fruits they are. Every act of the spiritual life must be performed by the intervention and agency of God's Spirit. As Christ is all in procuring salvation for us, so the Holy Spirit is all in imparting salvation to us. Our illumination and strength, our sanctification and comfort, are all his gifts; and therefore we should continually acknowledge our dependence upon him, and ask of God the communications we stand in need of. The importance of this is strongly marked by St. Matthew, who, relating the substance of our Lord's discourse, says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" but St. Luke sums up all good things in this, the gift of the Holy Spirit; because, without that gift, all that we possess is of no value; and with it, we cannot want any thing that is good.]

3. The efficacy and importance of prayer—

[Since God has so strongly declared his readiness to give us his Spirit, we may be well assured, that he will not refuse us any thing else: "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." But, on the other hand, we can expect nothing without prayer: "God will be inquired of by us," even for those things which he has promised to give us; nor will he give, if we neglect to ask. This also is intimated in the text itself; his favours are limited to them that ask him. It is true indeed, that the first desire after what is good is inspired by him; and, as far as relates to that, "he is found of them that sought him not, and known to them that inquired not after him:" but when he has once communicated this desire, he expects that it should be cultivated and improved at a throne of grace; nor will he open the gate of heaven to any, who do not knock at it with importunate and believing prayer. And can we think hardly of this condition? What if we ourselves had invited a child to come and ask of us the richest gifts we could possibly bestow upon him, and had done every thing in our power to assure him of our unalterable determination to grant his request; could he reasonably blame us

for suspending our grant upon his performance of so easy a condition? or is there a parent in the world who would not say, If you are too proud to ask for it, you shall not have it? Surely then if, through pride, or indolence, or unbelief, we will not make our supplications to God, we may well, yea, we must inevitably, be left to perish.

If this appear awful in one view, in another view it is most encouraging. Many are ready to say, 'Such an appeal as this affords no comfort to me: were I a child of God, I could not doubt, but that he would give me all that I could ask, with greater readiness than I would give a piece of bread to my beloved offspring: but am I his child? and, if not, what is this assurance to me?' But behold, as though he had intended to cut off all occasion for such a doubt, our Lord has here dropped the parallel, and says, "How much more will God give his Spirit, (not to his children, but) to them that ask him?" So then we have no occasion to inquire, Am I a child? We must go immediately to God and implore his best and choicest blessings, with a full assurance of success.

Some perhaps may reply, 'I have tried these means, and found them ineffectual.' But we are sure either that God has already answered in a way that was not expected, or that he will answer in due time. He is a God that cannot lie; and therefore we have nothing to do but to wait his time. Only let us "continue instant in prayer," and heaven, with all its glory, shall be ours.]