

FLIPPED

"THE FLIPSIDE OF INDEPENDENCE" MATTHEW 7:7-12

This Week's Core Competency

Prayer – I pray to God to know him, to lay my request before him and to find direction for my daily life. Psalm 66:16-20

*Come and listen, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.
17 I cried out to him with my mouth;
his praise was on my tongue.
18 If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;
19 but God has surely listened
and heard my voice in prayer.
20 Praise be to God,
who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me!*

When we pray, we often wonder "What if God doesn't answer my prayer?" We might equally well wonder "What if he does?" What's more, what if God answered every one of our prayers?" But before pursuing that thought, we should note that prayer involves more than petition; just read the book of Psalms. It contains prayers of *lament*, *thanksgiving*, and of *praise* and not just petition. It even contains prayers called *enthronement* psalms that celebrate the reign of God, in particular, with respect to the rule of messiah during the kingdom age (see Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible*

Just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care. Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.

- Garth Brooks

Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, 784-88). Suffice it to say that prayer involves more than petition although it certainly does involve petition.

Back to the question of whether expecting God to grant our every request is reasonable or even desirable, one well-known Christian author writes, "Apart from prayers impossible to answer—those that involve a logical contradiction such as opposing sides praying for victory, or farmers and athletes praying for conflicting weather patterns—what would happen if God answered every prayer? By answering every possible prayer, God would in effect abdicate, turning the world over to us to run. History shows how we have handled the limited power granted us: we have fought wars, committed genocide, fouled the air and water, destroyed forests, established unjust political systems, concentrated pockets of superfluous wealth and grinding poverty. What if God gave us automatic access to supernatural power? What further havoc might we wreak?" (Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference*, 228). What further havoc indeed!

The kind of mayhem that would result can be seen in the movie *Bruce Almighty*. In Hollywood's vision of what might happen if a mere mortal was God for a week, Bruce, played by Jim Carrey, exercises his new found divine powers capriciously. He clears traffic for his new sports car and gets his dog to use to toilet. He works revenge on rival coworkers and gets back at hoodlums who once threatened him. To impress his girlfriend, played by Jennifer Anniston, he lassoes the moon and pulls it near in order to put her in

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the mood for love-simultaneously causing a tidal wave in Japan. And when he answers "yes" to everyone who prays to win the lottery, he creates 400,000 winners unfortunately diluting the grand prize to almost nothing.

A different writer puts the thought of turning prayer into magic and everyone who prays into Aladdin a bit differently. He writes, "This concept of prayer would place an impossible strain on every sensitive Christian if he knew that he was certain to get everything he asked. 'If it were the case', writes Alec Motyer, 'that whatever we ask, God was pledged to give, then I for one would never pray again, because I would not have sufficient confidence in my own wisdom to ask God for anything; and I think if you consider it you will agree. It would impose an intolerable burden on frail human wisdom if by his prayer-promises God was pledged to give whatever we ask, when we ask it, and in exactly the terms we ask. How could we bear the burden?'" (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, TBST, 188).

Since we don't have the wisdom to know what's best in every circumstance, rather than *tell* God what we want, perhaps we should *ask* him for what want. The difference may be subtle, but it's none the less real. Maybe a simple observation will help. When our son was young he expressed his "petitions" in question form: "Dad, *can* I . . . ?" For example, "Dad, *can* I have a new bike?" "Mom, *may* I spend the night at Matt's house?" "Dad, *will* you take me to the mall?" I liked it when he *asked* me for what he wanted rather than *told* me what he wanted. His questions did two important things simultaneously. They expressed what he wanted, something I wanted to know, and at the same time, they expressed a submissive spirit that left granting his request up to me.

We don't need to *tell* God what we want because he already knows what we need. However, we do need to *ask* him for what we want because we need to express our submission to his will in the matter. Jesus petitioned God like this in the garden. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me," is what he prayed. "Father, can you or will you take this cup from me?" is what we might say he meant. Maybe we should think about using "can," "may," and "will" in our petitions to express that same nuance. Instead of, "Heavenly Father, give me a more reliable car," how about, "Heavenly Father, can I have a more reliable car?" Instead of, "Heavenly Father, heal Jeff and restore his health," how about, "Heavenly Father, may Jeff be healed and restored to health?" Instead of, "Heavenly Father, help me prepare for my final exams," how about, "Heavenly Father, will you help me prepare for my final exams?" In so doing, we express our requests to him but leave granting them up to him. We have to choose the *attitude* in which we come to God. We can tell him what we want, expect that he will grant our request, and then wonder why he didn't—if he doesn't. Or we can ask him for what we want and leave the granting of our request up to him knowing that in many instances we will be better off that he didn't—if he doesn't.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 7:7-12

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. (NIV(c)1984)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight "ask/s" in v.v. 7-11.
- * Underline "ask/s," "seek/s," and "knock/s" in vv. 7, 8.
- * Circle "it" in v. 7.
- * Box "for" indicating *reason* in vv. 8, 12.
- * Number the occurrences of "give" in vv. 9-11.
- * Bracket "bread" and "stone" in v. 9.
- * Bracket "fish" and "snake" in verse 10.
- * Circle "evil" in v. 11.
- * Underline "good gifts" (2x) in v. 11.
- * Box "how much more" indicating *comparison* in v. 11.
- * Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 12.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. In a word or two, what would you say Jesus is talking about in this passage?
2. Some commentators see a progression in "ask," "seek," and "knock." What about you? Explain.
3. Explain the relationship of verse 8 to verse 7.
4. What is the implied answer to each of Jesus' rhetorical questions?
5. Explain how Jesus argues from *lesser* to *greater* in verse 11.
6. Jesus calls his hearers "evil." In what sense was this true?
7. Explain how calling them that contributed to his argument.
8. What are disciples to "ask" their Father in heaven for—does Jesus say? Explain.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about how the Golden Rule "sums up the Law and the prophets."

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Matthew 7:7-12 isn't difficult to understand and can easily be divided into three parts. In the first (vv. 7, 8), Jesus enjoins his disciples to keep on praying and then explains why. In the second (vv. 9-11), he gives two examples of earthly fathers' faithfulness followed by an *a minori ad maius* (i.e., from *lesser to greater*) argument to convince them that their heavenly Father is even more faithful. In the third (v. 12), he concludes this portion of the sermon concerning righteousness, which began in 5:17-20, with the Golden Rule that "sums up the Law and the Prophets." About verses 7-11 one commentator writes, "This little section concludes the long string of imperatives that constitute the core of the Sermon on the Mount from 5:21-7:6. We have been asked to forgo anger and retaliation, to love our enemies and forgive those who have injured us, and to control our criticism of others. How can we fulfill all these demands and manifest the higher righteousness of the kingdom? These verses remind us that for us this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (see 19:26). That is, only by persistently asking, seeking, and knocking at heaven's door through prayer will we find grace to obey these impossible demands. Solely through tenacious dependence on God's graciousness can we deal graciously with those who provoke a negative reaction in us" (Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation, 78, 79).

The parallelism in verses 7 and 8 is obvious. The commands to "ask," "seek," and "knock" in verse 7 are matched by the by the phrases "everyone who asks," "he who seeks," and "him who knocks" in verse 8. That Jesus is referring to persistence in prayer in verse 7 goes without saying; perhaps this kind of prayer should be called *lifestyle* prayer. The word "for" introduces the *reason* behind such persistence; disciples who persist in prayer are rewarded by their heavenly Father. The passive verbal forms that follow in verse 8 called *divine passives* imply that God is the one who gives and opens the door. Jesus doesn't tell his disciples what to ask for, but verse 11 implies that the "it" of verse 7 is some "good" gift from the Father. No doubt the everyday needs of the disciples are included in that category, but perhaps Jesus has something more in mind, like grace needed to follow the instructions he has previously given. If disciples cannot muster

the virtues demanded by Jesus—and none can—they must ask God for them. As one writer advises, "The kingdom of heaven requires poverty of spirit, purity of heart, truth, compassion, a non-retaliatory spirit, a life of integrity; and we lack all of these things. Then let us ask for them! Are you as holy, as meek, as truthful, as loving, as pure, as obedient to God as you would like to be? Then ask him for grace that these virtues may multiply in your life!" (D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 148).

The logic of verses 9-11 is inescapable. Earthly fathers, even though they are fallen human beings, know how to give good gifts to their children. With that all agree. After all, what father would deceive his son by giving him a stone rather than a loaf of bread or a snake rather than a fish? None, of course, would do such a thing. With that all agree as well. Here comes the incontrovertible conclusion; wait for it. "How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" The force of the argument lies in a *contrast* rather than in a *comparison* between God and human beings. If human parents, although evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, *how much more* will God, who is not evil in the least but wholly good, give good gifts to those disciples who ask him? So ask him!

The function of verse 12 goes beyond the immediate context. Matter of fact, the Golden Rule has no obvious connection at all to persisting in prayer. The reason for this is simple; the verse belongs to an *inclusio* that brackets 5:17-7:11 like parentheses. One author confesses, "The logic of the 'so' or 'therefore' (*oun*) with which this verse begins is not plain. It may look back to the previous verse and imply that if God is good to all who seek him in prayer, his children must be good to all likewise. Or it may refer further back to the Judge not command, and take up the underlying argument against censoriousness and hypocrisy" (Stott, 190). More likely still is the suggestion of another who claims, "With its reference to 'the Law and the Prophets,' 7:12 ties back in with 5:17 and provides a frame to bracket the body of the sermon" (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 131). And so, Jesus caps off this major section of his sermon with what we know as the Golden Rule, which is clearly a restatement of the Old Testament command, "love your neighbor as

yourself" (Lev 19:18) put differently. "Why are we to act in this way?" one commentator asks. "Jesus does not say that we are to do to others what we would like them to do to us *in order that* they will do it to us. At stake is no such utilitarian value as 'honesty pays' or the like. Rather, the reason we are to do to others what we would like other to do to us is that such behavior sums up the Law and

the Prophets. In other words, such behavior conforms to the requirements of the kingdom of God, the kingdom which is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. It constitutes a quick test of the perfection demanded in 5:48; of the love described in 5:43-46; of the truth portrayed in 5:33-37; and so on" (Carson, 154).

The Message of the Passage

Christ's disciples keep on asking, seeking, and knocking confident their Father in heaven will give them the good gifts they need.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 7 **ask, seek, knock**

"The three imperatives in v 7 and three participles in v 8 refer to the same activity. No object is specified" (Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33a, *Matthew 1-13*, 174). "All three verbs are present imperatives and indicate the persistence with which we should make our requests know to God" (Stott, 184). "In the perfect three-fold symmetry of these two verses, the imperatives are emphatic and in the present tense. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking; ask, seek, knock, and keep on doing it; for 'everyone who asks receives; he who sees [sic] finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.' Persistence is required" (Carson, 147, 48). Some see a progression in these terms. "Although some see the present imperatives 'ask, seek, knock' as practically equivalent, it seems better to suggest that Jesus is indicating rising scale of intensity in one's prayers and point to the persistent manner of life lived before the Father" (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 312f).

v. 7 **it**

Cf., "good gifts" (v. 11). "One is not told what to request, what to seek, or that for which one knocks. The invitation is apparently as broad as the questions of vv 9-10 imply and the object thus as general as the [agatha], 'good things,' of v 11" (Hagner, 174).

v. 7 **will be given, opened**

"The passage does not emphasize the 'good things' themselves but the faithfulness of God as the provider of his people's needs. Thus the passive verbs [*dothesetai*] 'it will be given,' and [*anoigesetai*] 'it will be opened,' are so-called *divine passives*: God is the one who will give (cf. v 11) and open the door" (Hagner, 174).

vv. 9, 10 **stone, snake**

"The rhetorical questions of vv. 9-10 imply a negative answer and are based on the similarities in appearance between small loaves of bread and stones and between certain eel-like fish and snakes. No loving parent would try to trick his or her children into thinking their requests had been granted by such deceptive substitutions" (Blomberg, 130).

v. 11 **evil**

Gk *poneroi*; cf., "you sinful people" (NLT); "bad as you are" (NEB, NJB, GNT).

v. 11 **how much more**

Jesus argued likewise from *lesser* to *greater* in 6:26, 30. "Jesus closes with an *a fortiori* argument (arguing from an accepted conclusion to an even more evident one), called in Jewish rabbinic interpretation *qal wahomer* . . . If the lesser is true (the activity of earthly fathers who are tainted by the evil of this fallen world), 'how much more' the greater will be true (the response of the heavenly Father). Earthly fathers have an innate sense of doing right by their children and are not primarily mean or hurtful to them, even though they are still evil by way of the entrance of sin to all humanity through the sin of Adam and Eve (cf. Rom. 5:12-14). How much more will the heavenly Father, who is inherently perfectly holy and good, always give to his children what they need when they ask him" (Wilkins, 313).

v. 11 **good gifts**

"These 'good things' can be thought of as the eschatological blessings that accompany the presence of the kingdom (cf. Luke's 'Holy Spirit'), so that the work of the disciples in proclaiming the kingdom is primarily in view, or alternatively the more ordinary and ongoing needs of the disciples (cf. 6:32-33)" (Hagner, 174). Some take "good gifts" to refer not so much to material things "but spiritual blessings—daily forgiveness, deliverance from evil. Peace, the increase of faith, hope and love, in fact the indwelling work of 'the Holy Spirit' as the comprehensive blessing of God, which is how Luke renders 'good things'. For these gifts we must certainly pray" (Stott, 187). Others understand 'good gifts' to refer more specifically to divine enablement. "Jesus' disciples may find it difficult to be at the same time both merciful and forgiving, yet wisely discerning; to give other disciples the benefit of the doubt, yet to be on guard for those who would harm the community; to judge no one, yet to be wisely observant to see the true character of people and deal with them accordingly. But through the divine enablement that is supplied by God as Jesus' disciple pray, they can avoid the extremes of 7:1-5 and 7:6" (Wilkins, 312).

v. 12 **do to others**

"It is now widely acknowledged that the Golden Rule was not original to Jesus. With slight variations it is found in many authors, Jewish and non-Jewish. In the pre-Christian apocryphal book of Tobit we read, 'And what you hate, do not do to any one' (Tobit 4:15). Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus, is reported to have said to a Gentile inquirer, 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary thereon; go and learn it' (*Shabbath* 31a). The formulation attributed to Jesus is positive rather than negative, but no great emphasis should be placed on this difference, since each formulation implies the other when applied to specific situations . . . There is probably little difference in the way the two formulations function in the practical, everyday ethics of the follower of Hillel and the followers of Jesus" (Hare, *Matthew*, 79, 80). Carson, on the other hand, calls the difference between the two forms of the rule "profound." "The positive form is thus far more searching than its negative counterpart. Here there is no permission to withdraw into a world where I offend not one, but accomplish no positive good, either (153; cf. Stott, 191).

v. 12 **law and prophets**

Cf. 5:17. "The Golden Rule serves Matthew as a summary not merely of the sayings about love of enemies and nonretaliation but of all the other ethical teaching as well . . . These words take the reader back to their first use at 5:17 and thus bracket the central core of the sermon" (Hare, 81).

Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.
Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!

We show our dependence on God when we take everything to Him in prayer. Try playing this fun game to teach your kids about how God might respond to our prayers. Make three signs. Write "yes" on a green piece of paper, "wait" on a yellow piece of paper, and "no" on a red piece of paper. On slips of paper write things like "May I have a piece of candy?", "May I do a cartwheel?", "May I choose what we eat for dinner?" or "May I sing my favorite song?". Place all the slips in a container and have kids take turns picking one. Tell them there are three possible responses to their questions; yes, wait and no. As kids ask their questions, hold up one of the signs. When the game is over ask your kids how it felt when they got a "wait" or "no" answer. According to our text, God will answer our prayers according to His will. Remind your kids that just as you wouldn't give them things that would hurt them, God wants what is best for His children. And because God knows everything, He knows what is best for us. Make a new commitment this week to show your family's dependence on God by taking every decision to Him in prayer!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Matthew 7:7-12

1. What happens when we seek God?
2. Fill in the blanks. _____ and it will be given to you; _____ and you will find; _____ and the door will be opened to you. (v. 7)
3. How does the Bible say we are to treat others?

What Do You Think

1. Do these verses mean we get anything we ask for?
2. Who knows what is best for us?
3. We are to do to others as we would have them do to us. What does that mean?

What R U Going To Do

Place some candy or dessert on the dinner table early in the day. Tell kids that they must "wait" to eat it until after dinner. Remind them that sometimes God says wait because He knows what is best for us.

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Prayer - I talk to God so I can know Him, ask Him for things and find out what He wants me to do.

Memory Verse

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
 Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than thirty-five years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty-two years and have one son, Zach.

Keith Smith (B.A. in Speech Communication, Texas Tech University and M.A. in Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Family and Children's Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. Keith speaks at children/student camps across the country. He has developed a number of relational parenting seminars designed to motivate parents to empower their parenting by emotionally connecting with their kids. Keith lives with his wife, Denise, and their two children, Jordan and Alex.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.