

Getting in on God's Earmark Program

Matthew 7:7-11 CBC 4/26/09 a.m.

Central Truth: Jesus tells us “Ask, and if it’s a good thing, God will give it to you.” You can count on God supplying what you need to live out the characteristics of the kingdom in your life as you earnestly pursue His way and trust completely in Him.

Engage: Just as parents want the best for their children, so grandparents want the best for their grandchildren. I’ve never seen a parent or grandparent with more joy in giving than my late mother-in-law, Mildred Rasmussen, had in giving gifts to her grandchildren. For her, all year was a time when she looked for gifts that our children and her other grandchildren might enjoy. When our daughters were young she bought them Nancy Drew books or other Christian adventure books for our daughters to read. She bought them clothes, pretty dresses, and accessories to wear. In fact, we bought our five daughters, very little clothes the first ten or eleven years of their lives, as grandma provided so abundantly for them. I remember the Christmases we were able to open gifts with Janel’s parents, and the sense of joy and excitement, Mildred, Janel’s mother had as the girls prepared to open their gifts.

Now in our passage of Scripture we are going to consider today, we are going to see that God is a lot like a generous giving grandmother or grandfather. God is lot like a parent who wants the best for his or her child or children.

In particular this morning we are going to see that our Lord encourages us to pray, to ask God for things, and to expect Him to give them to us. “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened*” (Matt 7:7-8 NKJV).

Now someone says, “I’ve tried that; it doesn’t work. **I asked; God didn’t give it to me.** I don’t buy it.”

Scripture Reading: For the sake of that person, and for the sake of all of us who would like to be encouraged in our praying, let’s turn to **Matt 7:7-11** and see what Jesus is saying.

Preview: In these verses Jesus says: “Ask, and if it is good, God will say yes. Ask, and if it is good for you to have it, God will give it to you. Come like children, who spontaneously with joy and excitement ask for what they want, trusting their father’s wisdom. You too have a Father in heaven who loves you and is wise. **Ask. If it is good, God will say yes.**”

Today, in order to be encouraged in our praying let’s see **who** this is a promise to, and [**what** it’s a promise of. **Who** is Jesus talking to, and **what** is He saying to them? **Who** can claim this promise, and **what** promise can they claim?

Transition: First, **who** is this a promise to? ‘Ask, and it will be given to **you**.’ **Who’s** the “you”? “Seek, and **you** will find.” **Who’s** the “you”? **Who** is Jesus talking to?

(This is a promise for genuine children who are trying to please the Father.)¹

First of all, **this is a promise for those who are genuine children of God.** The context for the Sermon on the Mount indicates Jesus is focused on teaching His disciples, His followers. Matthew gives us the setting for the Sermon on the Mount with this opening description: SLIDE: “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, He went up the mountain. After He sat down **His disciples** came to Him. ^{5:2} Then He began to teach **them** by saying...” (Matt 5:1-2 NET). [Blank Slide]

Who is Jesus talking to here in Matt 7:7-11? **Jesus makes this promise to those who are genuine children of God.** Note how Jesus’ makes it clear that He is talking to those for whom, God is their Father. To help you see whom Jesus address **look at Matt 7:11 in your Bibles:** “*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 good things to those who ask Him!*” (Matt 7:11 NKJV). Jesus is not the Father, in the sense of a personal relationship, of every person. Jesus is only the Father of those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. **If you have been “born again” through faith in Christ, this promise is for you.** Christ promises to each of us who put our faith in Him that our Father will give good gifts to those who ask Him!

TRANS: But more specifically, **Jesus’ promise here is for those children who try to please their Father.** Jesus’ primary purpose in the Sermon on the Mount is to set forth God’s standard of righteousness in contrast to people’s ideas. People think if you don’t commit the act, you have not sinned. Jesus said, “If you lust in your heart,” you are guilty before God. If you respond with anger to someone, you are guilty of murder in your heart. The Sermon on the Mount reminds you & me of how much we need God’s mercy and grace to live in a way that pleases God. Just as an alcoholic or drug addict, must honestly face what he or she is, if they are to be helped, so you and I must see ourselves from God’s perspective if we are to be helped.

As you and I understand God’s will for us expressed through the Sermon on the Mount the question arises: “How can I live the Sermon on the Mount? How can anybody live up to such a standard?” Jesus’ point here as He prepares to wrap His sermon up is on the SOURCE of our stability as we learn to live a true kingdom life in this fallen world. We **NEED God’s divine help** and grace.

How can you and I receive what we need from God so that God’s righteousness and character characterizes our lives? Listen again to Jesus’ answer (in vv. 7): “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*” (Matt 7:7 NKJV).

Jesus emphasizes our need for persistence in our prayers. What is not captured well in English is that each of these commands—**ask, seek, & knock**—are in the present tense. Jesus issues a call here for our repeated or continual approach before God.

ILL: The late **Irving Berlin**, one of the most highly productive American songwriters [he wrote over 1000 songs], who wrote such songs as “God Bless America,” and “White Christmas,” had this as one of his nine rules for composing a song: “**Work and work and then WORK.**” Irving Berlin knew all about persistence in songwriting. Jesus urges you and me: **Have that same persistence when you pray.** (Cf. Robinson, 255.)

¹ Outline is taken from D. Sunukjian, *Biblical Preaching*.

Jesus' commands for us to **ask, seek, and knock** point to a rising scale of intensity in our prayers. Jesus command to: "Ask, seek, and knock" calls us to persistently pursue God's will in our lives. Jesus teaches us: **Be persistent** in your prayers. These commands are more like a video download than a snapshot. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. Don't give up!

"Ask" indicates coming to God with humility with an awareness of our need, like a child who appropriately comes to her mother or father with a need. "Seek" links our prayer with responsible activity in pursuing God's will. **For example**, a person fulfills this command as he or she prays for a job and at the same time checks out leads and sees what they can do to help make themselves more marketable. "Knock" includes the idea of perseverance in our asking and seeking, **as when you persevere in praying for your unbelieving family's salvation and at the same time seek to speak and live the gospel throughout your lifetime.** (Cf. Wilkins, 312.)

ILL: As Jesus' disciples we are **to ASK** the Father continually as a manner of life. In any discipline, spiritual or physical, repetition enables us to perfect it. Olympian **Ryan Hall**, who finished third in the Boston Marathon this past Monday, did not become an elite athlete by jogging around the block once a week. In any field, such as business, sports, medicine, art or any other area, it is the nature of any discipline, physical or spiritual, that we persist at it to do it well. We practice again and again. And so Jesus coaches us: **Persist in prayer! Stay at it! Show your dependence on God by continually asking the Father for what you need to do His will.**

At the same time be constantly responsible in pursuing God's will—**continually SEEKING God** and His will for your life. And then finally, maintain a confident determination in expecting our heavenly Father to answer—keep on **knocking**. Recognize your ongoing need for the intimacy of fellowship with God (Rev 3:20).

Now the promise Jesus gives in this passage should give all of us grateful hearts. Jesus' promise occurs toward the end of His lengthy sermon in which He describes the behaviors that please the Father. In His sermon Jesus provides the attitudes and actions that characterize those who are part of God's kingdom. God provides for you and me **not only the way for our salvation; Jesus also promises God will provide the power we need to live for Him!!!

Jesus reassures us that the Father HEARS us. Jesus wants us to know the certainty of the answer of our prayers to the Father. Jesus promises: "Ask, **and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you**" (Matt 7:7 NKJV). Then to reassure us of the universal certainty of God the Father's answer to our prayers Jesus promises: "For **EVERYONE** who asks **receives**, and he who seeks **finds**, and to him who knocks **it will be opened**" (Matt 7:8 NKJV). **Now don't miss this! This promise is not just for a few super saints** who will have their prayers answered. This promise is **for "everyone," meaning all of us** who have followed Jesus as His disciples. You don't keep at prayer then because God needs to be nagged into a response. **Persist in prayer because God has committed himself to answering your request!**

ILL (Robinson, 256): The bride-to-be was late to the wedding rehearsal. The groomsmen were getting a bit impatient so they began to kid the groom. They told him she wasn't coming. "**Let's all go home,**" they said. "You might as well call the whole thing off."

But the groom waited. The couple had made a commitment to one another, **and he knew she would arrive. He persisted because of His confidence she was coming.** Jesus emphasizes to you and me: **Persist in prayer because God has promised to answer.** Everyone who asks

receives. As we've seen this is not a blanket promise. The word *everyone* is limited by the context.

Reiteration: So who is this promise for? If you desire to obey God and please Him in whatever way you can, then THIS PROMISE IS FOR YOU. THIS IS A PROMISE FOR GENUINE CHILDREN WHO ARE TRYING TO PLEASE THE FATHER. Jesus addresses here you & me as we seek the things God would have for us to seek for the good of His kingdom and our basic needs (Matt 6:11, 19-34). Jesus' promise here is for the righteous—people who share kingdom values—**asking basic needs and requests concerning God's kingdom**. In our prayers we are to seek first the purposes of God's kingdom and also request for God to meet our own basic needs (cf. Matt 6:11, "Give us today our daily bread.").

ILL: I appreciate the illustration Bible preacher and teacher Haddon Robinson gives here [p. 256-57]. He notes: A century or so ago people sometimes closed their letters with the phrase. "Your obedient servant." That closing, he says, strikes us as odd, old fashioned, and even insincere. After all the letters were not written by servants, and we suspect the writer had no intention of obeying the person to whom he or she wrote. Robinson mentions he got a letter from the IRS signed, "Yours truly." He says, "I didn't believe that. I may belong to them, but they don't belong to me. And it's not enough to be *yours*, we must be **truly yours**. He says, "**That's about as meaningful as getting a valentine from boys at the garage.**"

But in a sense our prayers resemble a letter we send to God, a letter where we are making a request. And we close these letters with 'Your obedient servant.' We recognize we are followers of Jesus. Jesus promise here in vv. 7-8 are to those people who say to God, "I am truly yours. I want to be your person." **Jesus promise here is to those who persist in prayer because they believe God answers and who want what God wants for them.**

****Trans:** Now someone might say, "I hear what you are saying. I understand that this is a promise for genuine children who are trying to please God. But I have a question for you: **Does having my prayer answered hinge on the definition of 'a good thing'? Are you going to tell me the reason I didn't get what I asked for was because it wasn't 'good'?** It certainly seemed 'good' to me. Explain what you mean by 'a good thing.'" **WHAT is this a promise of?** What does Jesus promise?

This is a promise that God knows how to give you good gifts even more than you know how to give your children good gifts.

Jesus promises that God knows how to give you good gifts even more than you know how to give your children good gifts. As parents we want the best for our children, we want to meet their basic needs and provide guidance and direction for their lives. How much more does God want to take care of you! How much more does God want to provide the guidance and direction you and I need in life!

Now **in vv. 9-11** Jesus clarifies the open-ended teaching He gives on the certainty of God the Father's answer to our prayers. Jesus clarifies His promise by demonstrating that **our heavenly Father will answer with what He KNOWS is GOOD for us, His children.**

Now **as parents** we naturally want good things for our children. Look at what Jesus says in v. 9 in your Bibles: "*Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a*

stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?” (Matt 7:9-10 NKJV). Jesus makes the point that no parent would give a bad gift to His child asking for a legitimate need. Jesus asks: “Is there anyone among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ^{7:10} Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?” (Matt 7:9-10 NET). Jesus point is that **no responsible parent would be mean and trick their children** with stones that resembled bread. No responsible parent would be hurtful by tricking their children with snakes that resembled fish. **Jesus says, “You KNOW how to give good gifts to your children—bread, fish.”**

Jesus goes on to say, “You know how to give good gifts to your children, despite being “evil” (cf. v. 12). **What does Jesus mean when He calls us evil?** We, as earthly parents, are tainted by the evil of this fallen world. Evil came into this world through the sin of Adam and Eve (cf. Rom 5:12-14). The entrance of sin affects all of us. Our sin nature has an influence upon all of us. Jesus says here to us: **Despite having human imperfections and limitations as parents you know how to give good gifts to your children.** [cf. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*]. As our children come to us with requests for the basic necessities of life, we, as their parents are going to see that their needs are met. **Despite having human imperfections and limitations, you and I, as parents know how to give good gifts to our children.**

Jesus argues from this accepted conclusion—that as parents we know to give good gifts to our children—to an even more evident conclusion. **Look at v. 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 good things to those who ask Him!*” (Matt 7:11 NKJV).

Think about it! **God, our Father in heaven, having no imperfections or limitations, knows even more what good gifts to give us.** If the lesser is true, that we as earthly parents tainted by the evil of this fallen world know how to give beneficial gifts to our children who ask, HOW MUCH MORE does our Heavenly Father know how to provide us with what we need as we come to Him in prayer! As earthly parents we have an innate sense of doing right by our children. Now HOW MUCH MORE will the heavenly Father, who is by His very nature perfectly holy & good, always give to us, His children, what we need when we ask Him (cf. Wilkins, 313).

Jesus encourages you & me then: Come to God with confidence about what you need to carry out His will. The specific examples Jesus gives that children would request are basic staples in the Palestinian diet—bread and fish. Remember Jesus earlier in this same Sermon on the Mount promises He will meet our basic needs of food & clothing as we put Him first (Matt 6:25-34). Jesus will later provide bread & fish for His followers (Matt 14:19-20; 15:36-37). So Jesus encourages us: **God will hear your requests for provision today** (cf. Keener, 161; cf. Matt 6:11).

Now **Jesus does not promise to supply everything you WANT, but He does promise God will give you the good you NEED.** God does not promise to provide whatever we ask for. Jesus does not promise God will answer when we pray: Dear God, I would like a **new job** that pays double my present salary and gives me twice as much time off a year. Jesus does not promise when you pray for that **new, fast, sport car**, you will receive it. Jesus does not promise you will **never get sick**. Jesus does not promise God will supply whatever we ask for. Jesus does not promise: “If you name it, and claim it; God is under obligation to give it to you.” **Jesus does not promise to supply everything you WANT, but He does promise God will give you the good you NEED**

Jesus promises God will provide whatever is ultimately for His kingdom—anything necessary for you to fulfill God’s calling upon your life. Our Father will give appropriate consideration to each request you bring as His child. Jesus promises God will watch out for your true needs (cf. Matt 6:8).

Remember the context for this promise is Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:6). For those who persist in asking, God will supply what they need **to live out the characteristics of the kingdom in their lives.** In other words **Jesus promises our Father will supply what you need to carry out His will.** Pray with **earnest sincerity & active, diligent pursuit of God’s way, trusting God** to provide what you need.

God will supply what you need to live out the characteristics of the kingdom in you life as you prayerfully depend on and wholeheartedly seek Him.

EXPLANATION: So Jesus tells us: **“Persist in prayer, based on the knowledge that God has committed Himself to answer you.”** Just as a father would not give his hungry child a small, white stone that has the shape and color of small loaves of bread, not would a father give a snake that could hurt the child instead of a fish, so **trust God’s character.**

Jesus teaches: ‘Don’t be afraid that God will give you something **harmful**, something that will **destroy you.** God won’t mock you like that.”

APPL: Perhaps there’s someone here today, and you wrestle, as all of us do at times, with yielding yourself or yielding an area of your life to the Lord. “God, if I surrender myself to doing whatever you want me to do, you may send me to Africa to live in a grass hut and eat grub worms,” we fear. Or “God if I surrender myself to you in my **dating and relationships**, I may remain single all my life.” So we start to date those who are not believers. We start to engage in activities that are morally wrong. We try to take matters into our own hands... And we begin to lack the peace and joy of the Lord. **Today, Jesus says to you: Commit your future into God’s hands.** “God, my number one priority is to advance your kingdom. **God I believe you’ve created me with that desire and need for marriage.** But God I want your direction. Give me wisdom and discernment I need to know your will in this area of my life. My hope and trust is in you. You know me. You love me. I commit my future into your hands.”

Jesus assures you & me here in this passage: “God cares about you and will provide what you need as you persist in seeking Him! You have a heavenly Father who is willing and wise enough to give you what you need.” The **emphasis** is on **God’s wisdom.** We often don’t know what to ask for. But **God knows what you need!**

*****ILL:** God does not always give us what we ask for because He knows what we need to best serve Him. As one wise person wrote: “I asked for **strength** that I might achieve; He made me **weak** that I might obey.

I asked for **health** that I might do great things; He gave me **grace** that I might do better things.

I asked for **riches** that I might be happy; He did not give them so that I might be wise.

I asked for **power** that I might have the praise of men; I was given **weakness** that I might feel a need of God.

I asked for **all things** that I might enjoy life; I was given **life**, that I might enjoy all things.

I received very few of the things that I asked for; but **I received the things** that I had **hoped for.**”

Jesus promises: God can supply the wisdom and guidance, the good you need to do His will.

REIT & TRANS: In the act of prayer you acknowledge you can not go it alone. When you ask, a Father answers. A Father answers who **loves** you. An all-powerful, perfect Father answers who promises to give **good gifts** to those who ask Him.

Transition: Now what should our response be to Jesus’ call to prayer? How should we respond to our Lord who encourages us to pray, to ask God for things, and to expect Him to give them to us? In light of our Lord’s encouragement to pray, and to request God’s wisdom and guidance:

Come, therefore, with all the spontaneity of a child, asking for what you want and expecting that if it is good for you to have it, your Father will say yes.

In light of the promise that our perfect heavenly Father gives good gifts, **COME with all the freeness of a child**, asking for what you want and expecting that if it is good for you to have it, your Father will say yes. **God has EARMARKS set aside for you and me.** He has promised and has set aside for you and me all that we need to meet our own needs and all that we need to advance His kingdom. Jesus invites us: Come freely to your loving, gracious Father who knows your needs and cares for you. **Come, therefore, with all the spontaneity of a child, asking for what you want and expecting that if it is good for you to have it, your Father will say yes.**

God will supply **what you need** to live out the characteristics of the kingdom in you life **as you keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.**

APPL: Do you need patience with people? Jesus promises that as you keep depending upon God for that, God will give that to you. Do you need help loving someone? God will provide that.

ILL: **Corrie Ten Boom** who had been taken to a concentration camp along with her family, and saw her father and sister die there, tells of a time after the war when she was speaking on God’s love and forgiveness. Afterwards a former German guard approached her and stuck out his hand. Corrie recognized him as one of the guards who had treated her and her sister and the other prisoners very cruelly. Her natural reaction was one of hatred and unforgiveness because of what he had done. But **as she asked the Lord to help her love this man as He did, and as she obeyed** and reached out her hand **God’s love filled her heart.**

Pray for what you NEED to do God’s will, THEN obey what you know God wants you to do. As you obey you will find God supplying you with what you need to do His will. **Come with all the spontaneity of a child, asking for what you want and expecting that if it is good for you to have it, your Father will say yes.**

What do you and I really need? Good gifts? Guidance and direction? Yes. God knows we need bread and fish to eat. But **what we really need is God.** If we persist in music, sports, or business, we may gain recognition and wealth; but the greatest gift from persistent prayer is God Himself. Therefore: **Come with all the spontaneity of a child, asking for what you want and expecting that if it is good for you to have it, your Father will say yes.**

Today Jesus stands at the door of your life. Believer, Christ stands waiting for you to open up to Him, to invite Him in to meet the deepest needs of your soul and life..... Christ also stands at the door of your life, for those of you who have not yet put your faith in Jesus Christ...