



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 24
Matthew 7:7-11: Topic 23

Study By
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Greek NT

7.7 Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθη-
σεται ὑμῖν, ζητεῖτε καὶ
εὕρησεται, κρούετε καὶ
ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν· 7.8
πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβά-
νει καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὕρισκει
καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγη-
σεται. 7.9 ἢ τίς ἐστὶν
ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος, ὃ
ν αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ
ἄρτον, μὴ λίθον ἐπιδ-
ώσει αὐτῷ; 7.10 ἢ καὶ
ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ, μὴ ὄφιν
ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 7.11 εἰ
οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες
οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ
διδόναι τοῖς τέκνοις
ὑμῶν, πόσω μᾶλλον ὁ
πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς
οὐρανοῖς δώσει ἀγαθὰ
τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν αὐτόν.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

7 Bittet und ihr werdet
bekommen! Sucht und
ihr werdet finden! Klopft
an und es wird euch
geöffnet! 8 Denn wer
bittet, der bekommt; wer
sucht, der findet; und wer
anklopft, dem wird geöff-
net.
9 Wer von euch würde
seinem Kind einen Stein
geben, wenn es um Brot
bittet? 10 Oder eine Sch-
lange, wenn es um Fisch
bittet? 11 So schlecht ihr
auch seid, ihr wisst doch,
was euren Kindern gut
tut, und gebt es ihnen.
Wie viel mehr wird euer
Vater im Himmel denen
Gutes geben, die ihn
darum bitten.

NRSV

7 Ask, and it will be giv-
en you; search, and you
will find; knock, and the
door will be opened for
you. 8 For everyone who
asks receives, and every-
one who searches finds,
and for everyone who
knocks, the door will be
opened. 9 Is there any-
one among you who, if
your child asks for bread,
will give a stone? 10 Or if
the child asks for a fish,
will give a snake? 11 If
you then, who are evil,
know how to give good
gifts to your children, how
much more will your Fa-
ther in heaven give good
things to those who ask
him!

NLT

7 Keep on asking,
and you will be given
what you ask for. Keep
on looking, and you will
find. Keep on knock-
ing, and the door will be
opened. 8 For everyone
who asks, receives. Ev-
eryone who seeks, finds.
And the door is opened
to everyone who knocks.
9 You parents – if your
children ask for a loaf of
bread, do you give them
a stone instead? 10 Or
if they ask for a fish, do
you give them a snake?
Of course not! 11 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.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

The rapid-fire series of three admonitions at the outset of this passage raise some interesting questions. What is Jesus talking about? Requests put to other people in daily living? Prayer petitions to God? What is the literary relationship of these three admonitions? Three separate, different requests? Or, one basic request stated three times with different words for emphasis? Finally, what is the literary connection of vv. 7-8 to 9-11? Especially does a close connection to these two pericopes limit the first pericope to a prayer petition? Additionally, in the larger issue of literary setting, what is the connection of 7:7-11 to the Model Prayer in 6:9-13? The answers to these questions will profoundly shape the interpretive conclusions derived from our passage.

Historical Context:

In the background of this text lays the social issues of patterns of propriety for making requests of other people and of deity. In modern western society individuals make requests / demands of other people with considerable freedom and frequency. This is particularly true for friends and family members. Beyond these two circles of acquaintances making requests / demands takes on a different tone, usually more formal in nature. In these settings requests put to others will often be in a business context where a purchase / sale of goods provides the basis for some particular request / demand.

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

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Also helpful is the distinction between a request² and a demand³. When does a request become a demand? What are typical characteristics between the two actions?⁴ Particular important: how appropriate are the two actions in varying social situations? Given the ambiguity of the English language, one must explore synonyms and antonyms of these two terms as well.⁵

The social question is how this worked in the ancient world, in comparison to modern western society. What kinds of boundaries existed? What social proprieties shaped the nature of request / demands in that world? Did those shift from culture to culture in the first century Greco-Roman world? In particular, how did making requests / demands work in first century Jewish culture? Especially important for this passage is the exploration of this issue in connection to these actions directed toward deity.

Finding answers to these questions can provide a historical backdrop to understanding this passage against the world of Jesus.⁶ And in particular, understanding that world in comparison to our world at this point of making requests / demands.

The foundation of such an analysis is the language of request / demand in ancient Greek and Hebrew. Language functions in large part as a mirror of the culture it exists in and so becomes important as a source of cultural understanding.

²“Request,” Merriam-Webster online dictionary: “Etymology: Middle English *requeste*, from Anglo-French, from Vulgar Latin **requaesta*, from feminine of *requaestus*, past participle of *requaerere* to require. Date: 14th century. 1 : the act or an instance of asking for something. 2 : something asked for <granted her request>. 3 : the condition or fact of being requested <available on request>. 4 : the state of being sought after : demand”

³“Demand,” Merriam-Webster online dictionary: “Date: 13th century. 1 a : an act of demanding or asking especially with authority <a demand for obedience> b : something claimed as due <a list of demands>. 2 archaic : question. 3 a: willingness and ability to purchase a commodity or service <the demand for quality day care> b : the quantity of a commodity or service wanted at a specified price and time <supply and demand>. 4 a : a seeking or state of being sought after <in great demand as an entertainer> b : urgent need. 5 : the requirement of work or of the expenditure of a resource <equal to the demands of the office> <demands on one’s time> <oxygen demand for waste oxidation>”

⁴Quite interesting and pragmatically helpful is a blog post discussion of the difference between request and demand:.

“When you are asking another to do something for you or to give you something, are you requesting or are you demanding? Here is the difference: **Request**- this is what I want of you, and my own well-being and my care, respect and love for your is neither diminished nor enhanced by your response to my request. **Demand**- here is what I want from you or else! The “else” could range from playing the victim: “I am hurt and you are responsible” to playing the persecutor: “How dare you!” This, more often than not, leads to manipulating, arguing, and to fighting and/or walking away. Demands are at the root of violent communication. Requests, as described above, contribute to peaceful and loving communications and, consequently, smooth relationships. When you make requests of people, if they are truly innocent requests (in the sense that you are not attaching anything to the no you might get and there is no underlying ‘threat’ in your mind about what you are going to do to punish the person refusing your request), people sense the energy of that, and they are never offended. As a matter of fact, they are more likely to give you what you want or if they can’t, they would gracefully tell you what they can do and discuss alternatives with you. On the other hand, people are usually offended by a demand, because it awakens a form of “defensive” energy inside of them. So the more you can clean up your requests so that they are more genuine requests, the less your communication with others is filled with arguments and verbal fights. However, this is NOT the reason you might want to consider making requests instead of demands. You can be genuinely sharing what you want with others and they would still perceive it as a demand and offend themselves. The reason you might want to consider cleaning up your requests is that you will feel better inside of you when you do that. When you are not attached to people responding in a certain way, you keep your peace. Remember: all frustrations are the results of (attachments to) expectations.”

⁵“**Request**,” Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Thesaurus*., Previously Published as: Webster’s Collegiate Thesaurus. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1988). : “**request** *verb.* **synonyms** ASK 2, bespeak, desire, solicit. **related words** appeal, petition, pray, sue.”

“**Demand**,” Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Thesaurus*., Previously Published as: Webster’s Collegiate Thesaurus. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1988).: “**demand** *noun.* **1 synonyms** REQUIREMENT 1, need, want **2 synonyms** NEED **3**, occasion, use. **demand** *verb.* **1** to ask for something as or as if one’s right or due <the physician demanded payment of his bill>. **synonyms** call, challenge, claim, exact, postulate, require, requisition, solicit. **related words** ask, request; bid, charge, command, direct, enjoin, order; cite, summon, summons; coerce, compel, constrain, force, oblige; necessitate. **contrasted words** cede, relinquish, resign, waive; allow, concede, grant; give, offer, tender. **2** to have as a need or requirement <it demands considerable practice to master the piano>. **synonyms** ask, call (for), crave, necessitate, require, take **related words** fail, lack, need, want. **idioms** need (or want), doing, stand in need of.

“**demanding** *adjective.* **synonyms** ONEROUS, burdensome, exacting, exigent, grievous, oppressive, taxing, tough, trying, weighty. **related words** rigid, rigorous, severe, stern, strict, stringent; crying, imperative, importunate, instant, pressing, urgent. **antonyms** undemanding”

⁶For an exploration of the more general topic of prayer see Bible study #15 on Matt. 6:5-15 in this series on the Sermon on the Mount. Our focus here is on the more limited topic of petitions made to God.

The series of Greek words that can be translated either as 'request' or 'demand' is extensive within the pages of the New Testament.⁷ The concepts of 'requesting' and 'demanding' grow out of the concept of "desire" that leads to "asking," an attitude that is verbalized. The level of intensity in the 'asking' determines the translation of either 'request' or 'demand.' For the most part, all three concepts -- asking, requesting, demanding -- play off the same set of Greek words, as Louw-Nida underscore.⁸

Ask For, Request (33.161-33.177)

33.161 ἐρωτάω^b; ἐπερωτάω^b: to ask for, usually with the implication of an underlying question—'to ask for, to request.'³⁰

ἐρωτάω^b: ἠρώτα αὐτὸν ἵνα τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐκβάλῃ ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς 'she asked him to drive the demon out of her daughter' Mk 7.26. See also footnote 33.

ἐπερωτάω^b: πειράζοντες ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτὸν σημεῖον 'they wanted to trap him, so they asked him (to perform) a miracle' Mt 16.1.

33.162 ἐπερώτημα, τος n: (derivative of ἐπερωτάω^b 'to ask for,' 33.161) that which is asked for—'request, appeal.' βάπτισμα ... ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν 'but baptism ... is a request to God for a good conscience' 1 Pe 3.21. It is also possible to interpret ἐπερώτημα in 1 Pe 3.21 as meaning 'pledge' or 'promise,' in which case it may be classified under 33.288. Accordingly, the phrase συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν may be rendered as 'a promise made to God from a good conscience.'

33.163 αἰτέω; παραιτέομαι^a: to ask for with urgency, even to the point of demanding—'to ask for, to demand, to plead for.'³¹

αἰτέω: αἰτήσον με ὃ ἐὰν θέλῃς, καὶ δώσω σοι 'ask me anything you want and I will give it to you' Mk 6.22; ἠτήσατο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ 'he asked for the body of Jesus' Mt 27.58; παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος 'to anyone who asks you for an account of your hope' or '... to give a reason for your hope' 1 Pe 3.15. See also footnote 33.

παραιτέομαι^a: κατὰ δὲ ἑορτὴν ἀπέλυεν αὐτοῖς ἓνα δέσμιον ὃν παρηγοῦντο 'at every Passover Feast he would set free any prisoner the people asked for' Mk 15.6.

33.164 αἴτημα, τος n: (derivative of αἰτέω 'to ask for,' 33.163) that which is being asked for—'request, demand, what was being asked for.' Πιλάτος ἐπέκρινεν γενέσθαι τὸ αἴτημα αὐτῶν 'Pilate passed the sentence that they were asking for' Lk 23.24.

33.165 ἀπαιτέω: to ask for something to be returned—'to ask back.' ἀπὸ τοῦ αἴροντος τὰ σὰ μὴ ἀπαίτει 'when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back' Lk 6.30. In some languages it may be necessary to be quite specific and detailed in rendering ἀπαιτέω in Lk 6.30, for example, 'when someone takes from you what is yours, do not ask that he give it back to you.'

33.166 ἐξαιτέομαι: to ask for something and to receive what one has asked for—'to ask for with success, to ask and to receive.' ὁ Σατανᾶς ἐξητήσατο ὑμᾶς τοῦ σιναίσει ὡς τὸν σίτον 'Satan asked and received permission to sift you like wheat' Lk 22.31.

33.167 ζητέω^d: to ask for something which is being especially sought—'to ask earnestly for, to demand.' ζητοῦντες παρ' αὐτοῦ σημεῖον 'they demanded that he perform a miracle' Mk 8.11. For another interpretation of ζητέω in Mk 8.11, see 57.59.

33.168 παρακαλέω^a; παράκλησις^b, εως f: to ask for something earnestly and with propriety—'to ask for (earnestly), to request, to plead for, to appeal to, earnest request, appeal.'

παρακαλέω^a: διὰ ταύτην οὖν τὴν αἰτίαν παρεκάλεσα ὑμᾶς ἰδεῖν καὶ προσλαλήσαι 'that is why I have earnestly asked to see you and to talk to you' Ac 28.20. It is also possible to interpret παρακαλέω in Ac 28.20 as meaning 'to call together' (see 33.310).

πράκλισις^b: μετὰ πολλῆς παρακλήσεως δεόμενοι ἡμῶν 'with an earnest appeal, they begged us' 2 Cor 8.4.

33.169 ἐντυγχάνω^a: to ask for something with urgency and intensity—'to plead, to beg, to appeal to, to petition.' ὅτι κατὰ θεὸν ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἀγίων 'for (the Spirit) pleads with God on behalf of his people' Ro 8.27; περὶ οὗ ἅπαν τὸ πλῆθος ἐνέτυχον μοι 'about whom all the people appealed to me' Ac 25.24. In translating expressions such as 'to plead' or 'to beg' or 'to appeal to,' the implications of urgency or intensity are often expressed in figurative ways, for example, 'to ask for with the heart exposed' or 'to ask for with crying words' or 'to beg with one's hands outstretched.'

33.170 δέομαι: to ask for with urgency, with the implication of presumed need—'to plead, to beg.' δέομαί σου, μὴ με βασανίσῃς 'I beg you, don't punish me' Lk 8.28. See also footnote 33.

33.171 δέησις, εως f: (derivative of δέομαι 'to plead, to beg,' 33.170) that which is asked with urgency based on presumed need—'request, plea, prayer.' μὴ φοβοῦ, Ζαχαρία, διότι εἰσηκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου 'do not be afraid, Zechariah! (God) has heard your prayer' Lk 1.13.³²

33.172 ἰκετηρία, ας f: that which is being urgently requested by a suppliant—'plea, supplication.' ὅς ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς

⁷For example, Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida list sixteen different words or word phrases under the general category of 'Ask for, Request' (33.161-177) in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:406-408. Within this listing categories 163, 164, 167 fall under the semantic category of 'demand' rather than 'request.' ..

⁸Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:406-408.

σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, δεήσεις τε καὶ ἰκετηρίας ‘in his life on earth (Jesus made) his prayers and pleas (to God)’ He 5.7.

33.173 *ἐπαιτέω; προσαιτέω*: to ask for charity—‘to beg.’

ἐπαιτέω: σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω, ἐπαιτεῖν αἰσχύνομαι ‘I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg’ Lk 16.3.

προσαιτέω: τυφλὸς ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν προσαιτῶν ‘a blind man was sitting and begging by the road’ Mk 10.46 (apparatus).

33.174 *προσαίτης, οὐ μ*: (derivative of *προσαιτέω* ‘to beg,’ 33.173) one who asks for charity—‘beggar.’ οἱ θεωροῦντες αὐτὸν τὸ πρότερον ὅτι προσαίτης ἦν ‘those who had seen him before this as a beggar’ Jn 9.8.

33.175 *προσανατίθεμαι^b*: to ask someone for advice—‘to consult with, to ask advice of.’ εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι ‘I did not go at once to ask advice of anyone’ Ga 1.16. In rendering ‘to ask advice of,’ one may often employ an expression such as ‘to ask what one should do’ or ‘to ask, What shall I do?’

33.176 *ἐπικαλέομαι^a*: to call upon someone to do something, normally implying an appeal for aid—‘to call upon, to appeal to, to ask for help.’ ἐγὼ δὲ μάρτυρα τὸν θεὸν ἐπικαλοῦμαι ‘I appeal to God to be my witness’ 2 Cor 1.23.

ἐπικαλέομαι^a also occurs in such expressions as ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου (Ac 2.21) ‘whoever calls upon the name of the Lord,’ but the meaning is essentially the same as ‘to call upon the Lord,’ since τὸ ὄνομα ‘the name’ may simply be a metonym for ‘the Lord.’

33.177 *καλῶς^e*: a marker of polite request—‘please.’ σὺ κάθου ὧδε καλῶς ‘please sit here’ Jas 2.3. For another interpretation of *καλῶς* in Jas 2.3, see 87.25.

The root Greek words from which a request or a demand is derived include the following: *ἔρωτάω, αἰτέω, ζητέω*, and *δέομαι*. From these four verbs compound verbs and nouns are constructed that express the idea of asking for something.

In general, one can understand that the nature of asking ranges from the polite request to the harsher demand depending on the social setting of the action. The Greco-Roman world, along with ancient Jewish society to a lesser degree, was an extremely sensitive class conscious society, as is defined by the Greek philosopher Plato, especially in his writing, *The Republic*. Everyone in society occupied a particular *στάσις* (station) in life. The nature and tone of relationships between humans then depended on whether one was connecting to others on the same ‘station’, on a lower ‘station’, or on a higher ‘station.’ The ‘higher to lower’ station connection could and often took on the tone of demands. But the ‘lower to higher’ station connection could only have the tone of request. To issue a demand from a ‘lower’ station made the demand an insult that could bring harsh repercussions, including execution. ‘Asking’ on a level plane of stations could go either direction, depending on what was desired. Jewish society in general followed similar patterns, although motivated by different cultural and religious dynamics than those out of Greco-Roman culture.

One should also note that deity was considered to be the highest ‘station’ and humans always existed on a lower ‘station.’ Thus one never demanded anything from God; only requests were considered appropriate. A reflection of this can be traced in the Greek New Testament, although Koine Greek at the beginning of the Christian era was undergoing rapid changes. The Optative mood verb form in the “Voluntative” function was the standard way for expressing polite requests to deity and to individuals in a higher ‘station’ in life. Consequently, most of the prayer petitions in the New Testament using verbal expressions are couched in the Optative verb. Put simply, one never demanded anything from God; petitions must always be asked in the attitude of respect and reverence for God. At the time of Jesus, Koine Greek was undergoing a rapid simplification process so that both the subjunctive and imperative mood forms of Greek verbs were also being used for polite requests. Thus a variety of patterns surface inside the New Testament. But given the Jewish heritage of profound reverence for God and His name, all of the prayer petitions inside the New Testament should be understood as requests and never ever as demands. Only pagans and heretics would dare address the God of Abraham with a demand!

Literary Aspects:

The assessment of the literary dimensions of this passage will play a pivotal role in the interpretive conclusions. Thus they need to be carefully examined.

Literary Form:

Again, the general classification of 7:7-11 falls into the Sayings of Jesus, i.e., *Logia Jesu*. At the sub-level, however, two distinct patterns are present, both of which are very Jewish in their orientation. Verses seven and eight use a combination of the command / promise (v. 7) form with a rationale (γὰρ) for it in verse eight. The command / promise is given in triplet form of ask, seek, and knock. Then the rationale that follows is given in matching triplet form as well. Important to notice is the second plural imperatives

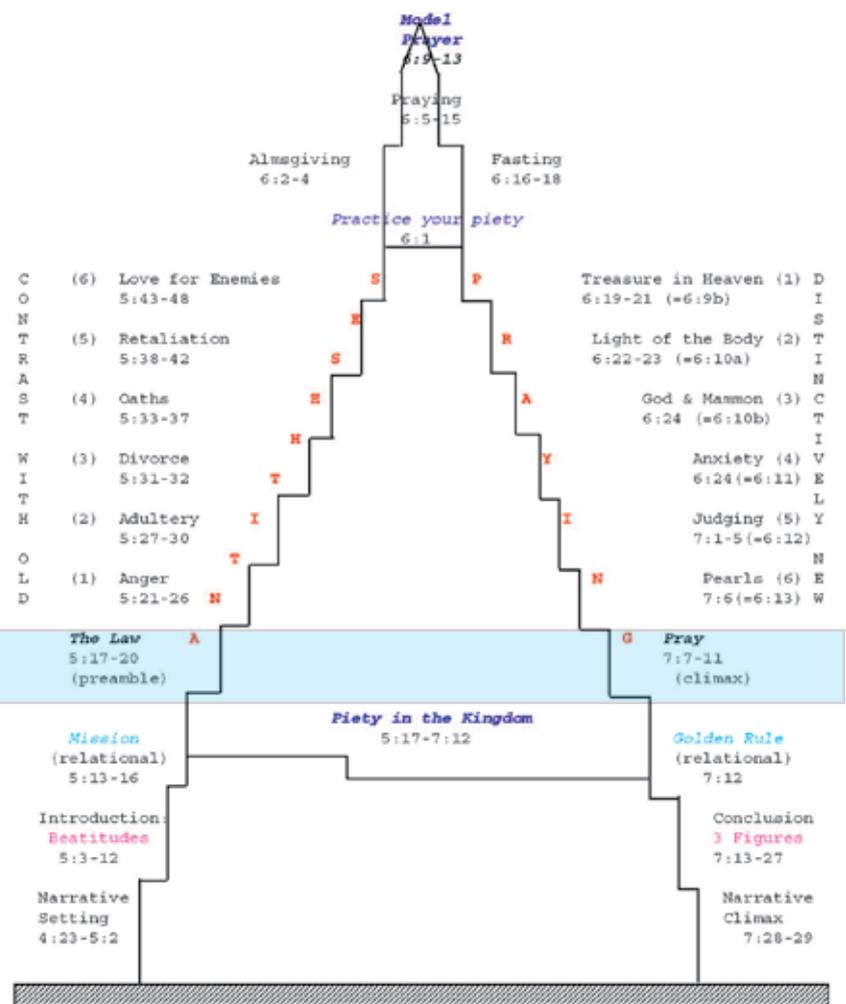
in the first part, while in the rationale the more appropriate third person singular pattern is used which gives the rationale a timeless principle quality as the foundation for the admonitions. The duplicated triplet pattern argues strongly for repetition for emphasis sake, rather than for three separate, detached admonitions. Particularly in Jewish thought patterns, given the symbolical importance of the number three for completeness, a threefold repetition represented strong emphasis upon a single subject.

The second section in verses nine through eleven is less distinctly Jewish oriented and this kind of reasoning is also found among Greeks and Romans. Two rhetorical questions introduce the unit and appeal to an earthly father in relation to his son. The assumption of the two questions about bread and fish is that an earthly father cares enough about his son to provide him the basic staples of a Jewish diet, particularly in northern Palestine close to the Sea of Galilee. The conclusion (οὐν) drawn in verse eleven is comparative in nature. If an earthly father cares for his son, how much more does the Heaven Father care for those making petitions to Him. This segment of reasoning is very Jewish, and would not have been common among Greeks and Romans who seldom saw in their male gods any model of compassionate care for mortals.

Literary Setting:

The literary context of 7:7-11 is important to the interpretive process from several angles. **First**, it stands as the climax of the six previous pericopes, 6:19-21, 6:22-23, 6:24, 6:25-34, 7:1-5, and 7:6. This focuses the passage on prayer rather than generalized requests made to other people. **Second**, with it standing before 7:12, the so-called Golden Rule, these two passages together stress again the vertical / horizontal orientation of religious experience so important in the Sermon and derived from Jesus' Jewish heritage out of the Old Testament. We have already seen this emphasis in the Beatitudes and the Model Prayer. And now it surfaces once more. **Third**, in its connection to the Model Prayer in 6:9-13, it comes as a natural outgrowth of the emphasis on praying. After giving both instructions on praying in six petitions in the model prayer and then commenting on the implications of such praying in 6:19-7:6, the conclusion now is a dramatic stress to pray, pray, pray. And to do so in great confidence that God will hear and respond to this kind of praying. His promise is to answer (vv. 7-8) and His greater compassion prompts Him to answer (vv. 9-11).

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lein L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

The structural chart to the right highlights this understanding. Additionally, its standing opposite of the emphasis on the Law in 5:17-20 probably has some significance as well. In 5:17-20, Jesus affirmed his positive stance toward the Old Testament -- in contrast to his largely negative critique of the Jewish interpretation of it in 5:21-6:18. It is in the Jewish roots of the Old Testament, not the twisted interpretation of it by the scribes and Pharisees, that one finds the true way to God, and the foundation for Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven rests on the Old Testament. Out of that foundation comes the stance that central to religious experience is

admonition with reason. The rationale in verse eight shifts to the third person expression more natural to an axiomatic saying with timeless truth. The same or similar sets of verbs are repeated -- ask / receives; search / find; knock / open -- thus linking them to the command / promise units in matching forms. Thus the admonitions with the divine promise are re-enforced by the claim that meeting the demands of the admonitions guarantees success in divine response.

The second segment of the passage, #s 146-148, repeats the threefold emphasis of the first segment. But this time, the literary structure is that of a pair of rhetorical questions having to do with an earthly father's concern for properly responding to his son's request for food. The third statement, # 148, draws a comparison of the level of compassion of an earthly father to the much greater level of compassion by the Heavenly Father. The argument moves ad maiore, from the lesser to the greater, -- a pattern of argumentation commonly employed by Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day. If the lesser case is true -- and experience confirms its accuracy -- then one can be certain that the greater case will also be true -- and one's experience with God will confirm it as well.

The two segments -- vv. 7-8 and 9-11 -- are tied together by the disjunctive ἢ (Or). The essential point of this word is to introduce another set of arguments. The nature of ἢ is to signal a new direction for what follows. Thus if the reader doesn't accept the first set of claims, then he should consider this new claim now being introduced.

The natural impact of the second segment in vv. 9-11 is to re-enforce the idea of God's compassion for His own children. God stands as the ultimate father figure who far exceeds any earthly father in care and compassion for his children.

Exegesis of the Text:

Command / Promise with a reason, vv. 7-8: "7 Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." (7.7 Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν, ζητεῖτε καὶ εὕρησεται, κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν· 7.8 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὕρισκει καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοιγήσεται.).

Commands and promises, v. 7. The critical interpretive issue here is what is designated by the three verbs, αἰτεῖτε, ζητεῖτε, and κρούετε. All three Greek verbs are broad and inclusive in scope, thus making the admonitions very general. The triplet emphasis pushes the reader to consider praying, praying, praying. But for what? The answer comes out of the literary context: pray for the things Jesus has instructed in the Model Prayer in 6:9-13. The Lukan parallel in Lk. 11:9-11⁹ pushes these same words along a similar path. Prayer includes on petitions made to the Heavenly Father. In both Luke 11 and Matthew 6, the Model Prayer sets forth the boundaries for those petitions.

When disciples pray as Jesus is teaching here, they can do so with full confidence of God hearing and responding to their requests. God will respond to their request, as He promises. One should be careful here to not miss interpret the promise. These admonitions and promises are not 'blank checks' giving disciples freedom to pray for their wants without consideration of the will of God. The promise of God's granting "good things" (ἀγαθὰ) in verse ten is re-defined in Luke 11:13 as God granting the Holy Spirit as His response to prayer petitions.¹⁰ Otherwise, God ceases to be a wise Heavenly Father and merely indulges the selfishness of His children. Even pagan fathers know better than to do this. Prayer

⁹Lk. 11:1-13 (NRSV): 1 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." 2 He said to them, "**When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.**" 5 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." 7 And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 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!"

¹⁰Careful consideration of the similar admonitions in Mt. 18:19; 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14; 15:7 should lead one to the same conclusion.

then moves toward magic and the paganism of the first century world.¹¹ God's response to our requests flows out of His compassion for us and His wisdom in knowing what is best for us.

Reasons, v. 8. The Old Testament stresses the faithfulness of God to respond to His children, e.g., Jer. 29:13; Prov. 8:17) and thus forms a starting point for Jesus' emphasis here. In proverbial declaration Jesus affirms the dependability of God to deliver on His promises. The threefold emphasis here matches the above threefold admonition to pray.

Appeal to fatherhood, vv. 9-11: "9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (7.9 ἢ τίς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἄνθρωπος, ὃν αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ἄρτον, μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 7.10 ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ, μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ; 7.11 εἰ οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ διδόναι τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν, πόσω μᾶλλον ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς δώσει ἀγαθὰ τοῖς αἰτοῦσιν αὐτόν.).

In providing this second set of arguments for trusting God to respond to our prayers, Jesus anticipates some who might question the accuracy of His first claim in vv. 7-8. The appeal to the compassion of an earthly father in comparison to the Heavenly Father follows traditional Jewish scribal argument. What we have already experienced from our earthly father forms a basis for anticipating God's response since He is the Heavenly Father, thus with much greater levels of compassion and resources.

Only a very perverted earthly father would give a stone in response to the request for bread by his child. Most likely Matthew stresses bread and stone in light of Jesus' temptation experience in 4:3. Even more bizarre would be giving a snake when a fish was requested. Luke narrates a scorpion for a requested egg in Lk 11:12.¹² The bread and fish represent basic, fundamental physical needs, not individual wants, being requested. Again, some signal of appropriate prayer requests is provided here.

What can be expected from the more compassionate Heavenly Father? "Good things!" (ἀγαθά). And what is that? The Greek adjective here means things inherently good and fundamentally of value. The highest good is affirmed in Jesus' words by Luke in 11:13: "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!" By God granting the presence and leadership of God's own Spirit in our lives, we receive the best possible response. The Holy Spirit brings the resources of the Heavenly Father into our life. God's Spirit moves us to strictly follow the paths of living and behavior laid out by Jesus. Nothing greater than this is possible as a response to our prayer!

What we encounter here is a dramatic emphasis upon praying. After laying out a detailed instruction on how to pray in 6:9-13 and 6:19-7:6, Jesus concludes with intensive encouragement for us to then put this kind of praying into practice as disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) How much do you pray?
- 2) What do you pray for?
- 3) Are you praying as Jesus teaches?

¹¹Note the helpful observations of Dennis Okholm: "At this point we must guard against equating Christian belief in the efficacy of prayer and magic. Magic attempts to control or manipulate the divine will in order to induce it to grant one's wishes, especially through the use of techniques such as charms, spells, rituals, or ceremonies. Christian prayer involves a struggle of wills in which the pray-er attempts to persuade God, all the time seeing prayer as a divinely given means whereby the pray-er can participate in God's agenda." [Dennis L. Okholm, "Prayer," Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology online]

¹² ἢ καὶ αἰτήσῃ ὄφιν, ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ σκορπίον; This stands in contrast to Matthew's ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ, μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσει αὐτῷ;