

“Petition: Prayer for Definite Things”

Matthew 7:7–11

Dr. Frank M. Barker, Jr., Pastor Emeritus

December 31, 2017 • Morning Service

Our text for this study is Matthew 7:7–11 and we are thinking of the importance of prayer here. We start with the promise stated. Matthew 7:7–11 says [7] *“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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [9] Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? [10] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? [11] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! What a promise!*

Notice the condition we see here. There is an earnest petition in Matthew 7:7. It is necessary that I bring the matter before God more than once and even as many as twenty. Isn't it enough to tell Him once? I might as well not even tell Him once since He knows what I'm thinking and the desire in my heart. He wants us to prove that we have confidence in Him and in His promises by bringing the matters before Him verbally. We take our places as creatures before our Creator here. It may be the reason why God is delaying in answering so we need to keep repeating it to Him. One reason may be we need to exercise faith and grow in faith as we pray.

The condition of earnest petition is not the only condition. Matthew 6:5 says [5] *And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.* There are other conditions here.

One, you need to be a Christian. Does God ever answer a non-Christian's prayer? Did He ever answer any of your prayers before you became a Christian? He may do it but He hasn't committed Himself to do and if He does do it then it's primarily to lead you to become a Christian, probably. Asking is not the only condition but you need to be a Christian.

Another condition we find in James 1:6–7 which says [6] *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.* Never have doubt. Ask the Father, believing He will hear and respond.

Another condition is the right motive. James 4:3 says [3] *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* You ask amiss, for the wrong reasons and to advance your own passions.

I John 5:14–15 says [14] *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.* Here we ask according to His will. How do I know His will? I have to search the Scriptures to know how He wants me to live and the impact He wants me to have.

We find another condition in John 14:13–14 which says [13] *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. [14] If you ask me^[e] anything in my name, I will do it.* We have to ask in Christ's Name.

Psalm 66:18 says [18] *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. I need to be seeking to do God's will.* My life needs to be characterized by His Word.

Obviously all of us have sins in our life that we need to be dealing with always and that's a very important and crucial part of us seeing God answer prayer.

I John 3:22 says [22] *and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.* We must be obeying God's law as a trend of life. It won't be a perfect life by a growing trend in our life to be obeying Him. There are tremendous conditions here and it is very important that we apply those to our life.

Matthew 7:7–8 says [7] *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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.* What a promise for this is a promise He gives to us when we ask. There are many other promises in the Bible that are similar in a sense to this one.

Jesus says in Matthew 18:19–20, [19] *Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. [20] For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.* We have prayer times here at the church and in the homes during the week. We also have people praying during the Sunday services. These are very important things we need to apply in our life.

We see another promise in John 15:7 says [7] *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* We need to abide in Christ by constantly relying on Him, relinquishing our will to Him and seeking to obey Him. We need to spend time in His Word daily, apply it in our life and memorize it. This is a wonderful promise about prayer and there are so many in the Bible like this.

These are general promises but there are specific ones like James 1:5 that says [5] *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* If you need guidance or financial resources and so on there are promises for those.

Then in our Matthew text there is a parallel drawn here. Matthew 7:9 says [9] *Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?* Here is a parallel drawn between us and our children. So how do we respond? Notice what we don't do. If they ask for something bad we don't give them something bad. We do give them things that will satisfy reasonable desires they have.

Then we are compared to God and His children in Matthew 7:11 which says [11] *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!* Who are His children? Are you God's child? How did you start off in this world? God created man in His own image, not physically but morally and spiritually in a sense. When a man thought right he loved the right things where his heart and mind was right and he chose the right things. That is the way God created Adam and Eve.

What were you like when you were born? Remember, Adam sinned and every person born from that point on was born with a sinful nature and was not in the image of God. So you start off in the wrong kingdom when you are born and you have a sinful nature. There is a kingdom of darkness and a kingdom of light. Right away that sinful nature in you starts manifesting itself. We are not God's children at that point. We are His creation but not His children.

There was One person born as His Child and that was Jesus Christ when He became Man but the rest of us started off in the wrong kingdom. We have to be translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light through His Son. When Adam sinned it

effected the whole human race and when I get to heaven I'm going to punch him in the nose. When we come into the kingdom of light we will no longer have Satan as our head but God.

We have to surrender our will to Jesus Christ through repentance. Repentance defined in our shorter catechism is through saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turns from it with full purpose of and endeavor after of in obedience. The other side of that coin is faith. When we put our trust in Christ as God's Son who died for our sin, paid for in full, rose from the dead and is offering us a gift of salvation with His righteousness being applied to us, He gives us a new nature.

As the hymn *Upon A Life I Did Not Live*, goes;
Upon a Life I did not lived,
Upon a Death I did not die,
Another's Life; Another's Death,
I stake my whole eternity.
That is faith in Jesus Christ.

I grew up in a Christian home and a Christian church. I believed everything was true. I believed the Bible was true and that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, rose from the dead and all that but I didn't surrender my will to Him and I didn't really put my trust in Him. I didn't realize salvation was a gift so my life was characterized by sin growing up. I went into the service and was a navy fighter pilot. I would get into close calls as a pilot and get religious for a week but there was no real change in my life. I would go back to my old ways of living. I really knew I needed to change something. I would pray and I was about to get out of the service. I felt God wanted me to go to seminary and be a pastor to make up for all the rotten things I had done.

My first quarter in seminary, my roommate was graduating. He said to me 'I'm pastoring a church in Oxford, Alabama and after I graduate I'm going to another place so how about you pastoring that church?' He did this on the weekends. I said 'I just got here. I don't know anything.' He said 'Well, they need a pastor.' Next thing I know I'm a pastor at that church and I pastored that church for a year and I knew something wasn't right. The church wasn't doing well and I didn't feel like asking my congregation or professors how you could be sure you believe in Jesus. There was an air force chaplain doing some post graduate work at the seminary where I was and he would go flying with me in the naval air reserve so I felt I could talk to him.

So I asked Joe, the chaplain 'How can you be sure you believe in Jesus Christ?' He gave me this little tract that brought out that salvation was a gift. I thought 'That's wrong, that's too easy.' I started reading my Bible to prove him wrong and all of a sudden I came across Romans 6:23 that says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* I thought 'He's right! It is a gift.' So I transferred my trust from my improved record to Christ and when I did that my life began to change. When that happened the church started to take off so it helps when the preacher becomes a Christian. When God leads us to Himself we will get a new nature with the Holy Spirit living within us to help us kill the old man that is still there. We will begin to grow and bear fruit and we are God's children then. This is through faith, of course.

Also according to Matthew 7:11 God will start giving us good things. They may be good things but they also may be painful. For instance, in Luke 11:13 it says [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! So when we are God's children we are given the Holy Spirit and we can be filled with the Spirit as we grow in Him. We want to learn what it means to walk in the light, walk in the Spirit, being yielded to Him and He will give us wonderful things.

He will answer according to His wisdom and goodness when we pray. I have some illustrations of people who prayed and received some interesting answers. Here is one from Chi Chi Rodriguez. He was a Christian and a very interesting golf player. He says "In May of 1987 I had a real low point. I had just blown another tournament. I mean I really blew it, missing about 13 puts. The next tournament was the Vantage at the Dominion Country Club in San Antonio, Texas but I didn't have the heart for it. In fact, I was thinking of calling it quits." So he decided to stay there in a hotel for three days and think, meditate and maybe God would show him something. He said "I had never asked God for a win but only for the strength to accept whatever happened but what was happening? It was as if God was talking inside of me to get out of here. So I packed my bags and took the next logical step in faith and went to the airport. Since the next tournament seemed to be the place to head I bought a ticket to San Antonio. When I got to the gate to board the plane, who should be standing there but Bob Toski and my mouth fell open. Bob is one of golf's top teachers. After some small talk I blurted 'Bob would you help me with my putting?' He looked at me and said 'Chi Chi I wondered when you were going to ask me to do that.'"

Chi Chi continued, "On the way to San Antonio he gave me some pointers. When we got to the practice green and saw me put he suggested a small change in the way I handled my club. The result was a birdied six of nine practice holes and then went on to win that Vantage tournament. In the next three months I won five more big tournaments earning in 1987 more than a half a million dollars plus the Golf Digest's title Senior Player of the Year. Yes, Chi Chi's my name and through the grace of God golf is still my game." Wow how is that for answered prayer!

Here is another illustration from a lady who used to attend Briarwood, named Jamie Crocket. She wrote me about an experience in her life. She said "I became a Christian at the age of 27 and at that time my desire was for a career and not marriage, home or a family. After becoming a Christian I began having a regular morning prayer time and in order to stay awake I would pray out loud and these words came out of her mouth; God, grant me children in a Christian home." She looked around to see who said that because that wasn't her desire. As time went on and she kept praying that God changed her heart and gave her a desire for children, a husband and a Christian home. She said 'I became convinced this desire was from the Lord.'

Then Jamie made a routine visit to the doctor and they referred her to an oncologist, a cancer specialist and there she learned she was a DES donor. Her mother while pregnant with her had been prescribed a drug which now has shown to produce cervical and womb malignancies in the female offspring. She didn't have cancer but she was in the premalignant phase. The oncologist scheduled her for a surgical procedure for which he assured her that none of his patients had ever developed complications but she did. Then he told her it was very doubtful she could have children. She asked God to show her answers to her questions from the Bible. God immediately brought to her mind I Samuel 1. She said 'I had never read this book of the Bible before but as I began to read about Hannah's struggle with barrenness I knew God was answering me. God answered Hannah's prayers with Samuel as a baby who had a special ministry for the Lord. Then God showed me the story of barren Elizabeth who gave birth to John the Baptist. Then He showed me barren Sarah who gave birth to Isaac, the child of promise

and then the story of Rebekah who was barren until she conceived twins, Jacob and Esau and then there was the story of Rachel whose barrenness ended with the birth of Joseph and then Benjamin.

Jamie continues, 'God had shown me an answer and that was the children of a barren womb has special uses by God. God had shown me that a fruitful womb was a blessing but a barren womb was a greater blessing.' After Jamie had some procedures done she was married five months later to a Christian husband and suddenly the doctors opinions began to change. The outlook for her fertility and child bearing became positive. The oncologist began talking of postponing a hysterectomy. Jamie said 'In March of this year we learned we were going to have a child in November. God is faithful.' This happened some years back but look at how God did those things in her life.

I have one more person I'd like to share about. There was a missionary to Africa named Helen Roseveare who was also a doctor. The following is an account from the missionary field she served in.

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died leaving us with a tiny premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive, as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator).

We also had no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (rubber perishes easily in tropical climates). "And it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. "All right," I said, "put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died. During prayer time, one ten-year old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. "Please, God" she prayed, send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon."

While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, "And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?" As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen". I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything, the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator! Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door.

By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box.

From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas – that would make a batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the ... could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out – yes, a brand-new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, “If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly too! Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked: “Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so she’ll know that Jesus really loves her?”

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months. Packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God’s prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child – five months before, in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it “that afternoon.”

Here is another account from Helen Roseveare. One night I return and at the veranda of my home stood an African man with his little wife carrying a baby, with a two year old toddler clutching his hand. I did not want to see anyone just then and had to stifle a feeling of annoyance. We went through the usual courtesies and asked him what he wanted. This man, who was a citizen of where she was working, says to her while she is on the mission field, “I need work.” With a relieved sigh she did not employ people but pointed to a house on the far side of the village where another missionary lived who might be able to help him.

“No,” he said stubbornly, “I was sent to you to get work.” Puzzled I asked what sort of work he wanted. “I’m a cook and I’ve been cooking for missionaries for 18 years.” She said ‘Thank God he didn’t say I’ve been cooking missionaries for 18 years.’ Helen asked “Why have you left your last employer then?” Silently he raised up his left arm and there at the top of his arm the mark of leprosy. ‘Oh no Lord!’ Helen thought in her heart. It wasn’t that she was afraid of leprosy but this would mean another clinic squeezed into another week of my already overfull timetable. We would have to have a separate building and separate equipment in medicine. In those days public opinion was such that she could not treat leprosy patients in the general in-patient department. God should have known I was already working 18 hours a day. Utterly stretched it was utterly unfair of Him to expect me to do more.

However, to argue with God in treating leprosy patients is a waste of time for they appear to be among some of His special favorites. So this man came into her home as her cook. Together they built a small home for him, his wife and his two little boys behind my home. We put up a small one room mud hut to serve as a clinic for leprosy patients just behind the newly finished men’s ward in our small hospital. We sent off to Stanleyville, 350 miles away for the needed medicines and equipment. Eventually the boxes of supplies arrived. We took out the supplies and then Helen picked up the bill. It was 4,320 Belgium Congo Franks and this was in 1954. This was worth about 30 pounds and 50 pence. She reminded God she didn’t have this money to pay this bill and God had led her to start this particular clinic for the treatment of leprosy patients but she was sure that God would pay the bill. She slipped the bill into her Bible.

The end of the month came and mission rules required that all bills be paid by the end of each month. No debts were allowed. There was no money available to pay this bill of 30 pounds and 50 pence. Why did God not provide? As I returned home at lunch her cook encouraged her to hurry saying that there was a brown envelope waiting for me. Another missionary sent it across apologizing that he had received it in his mail the previous day and had not noticed it was addressed to Helen from the field office. She opened the envelope and shook out the money which her cook carefully piled and counted. The statement in the envelope said the amount was 4,800 Belgium Congo Franks. A quick mental calculation showed the tithe to be 480 Franks in which she always gave a tithe to the Lord's work when someone gave her money. That left exactly 4,320 Belgium Congo Franks.

This total was made up of three gifts. One was from an unknown couple in North America, one from two prayer partners in Northern Ireland and one from a girl from the Crusader Union in southeast England. The North American gift had been on the way for some four months, transferred from the Philadelphia office to London Office to Brussels Office to Leopold and finally to Polis. Every transfer involved a certain percentage cost. At the end the three gifts had arrived together to make the exact sum needed and two of the gifts were designated for her leprosy work and she didn't have a leprosy work when the money was actually given. God knew and He stirred hearts to give. Wow, think about God's providence and His answer to prayer! This shows us the importance of prayer!

There are problems that we encounter and one problem is unanswered prayer. The Apostle Paul talks about this in II Corinthians 12:7–10 which says [7] *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. [8] Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. [9] But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. [10] For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* When you are weak then you get His power and you rely more and more on Him.

Then there is the problem of praying according to God's will. We have to meditate in the Word so that we know God's will and then ask in His Name for His will.

Lastly there is the problem of accepting His will in what is called the prayer of relinquishment. Catherine Marshall is a famous wife of a pastor and she says she got her first prayer of relinquishment in the fall of 1943. Here is the account; *It's a way of prayer that has resulted consistently in a glorious answer, glorious because each time, power beyond human reckoning has been released. This is the Prayer of Relinquishment.*

I got my first glimpse of it in the fall of 1943. I had been ill for six months with a lung infection, and a bevy of specialists seemed unable to help. Persistent prayer, using all the faith I could muster, had resulted in—nothing. I was still in bed full-time.

One afternoon I read the story of a missionary who had been an invalid for eight years. Constantly she had prayed that God would make her well, so that she might do his work. Finally, worn out with futile petition, she prayed, All right. I give up. If you want me to be an invalid, that's your business. Anyway, I want you even more than I want health. You decide. In two weeks the woman was out of bed, completely well.

This made no sense, yet the story would not leave me. On the morning of September 14—how can I ever forget the date?—I came to the same point of abject acceptance. I'm tired of

asking, *was the burden of my prayer*. I'm beaten. God, you decide what you want for me. *Tears flowed. I had no faith as I understood faith, expected nothing. The gift of my sick self was made with no trace of graciousness.*

And the result? It was as if I had touched a button that opened windows in heaven; as if some dynamo of heavenly power began flowing. Within a few hours I had experienced the presence of the Living Christ in a way that wiped away doubt and revolutionized my life. From that moment my recovery began. Wow, a prayer of relinquishment!

So we see the problems encountered here, praying according to His will and accepting His will. We have to get serious about it. Prayer is so crucial to our being effective Christians. Today is the day things are moving in the wrong direction here in our nation and around the world. E.M Bounds says 'God's promises are like giant corpses without life unless we appropriate the promises by earnest prevailing prayer.'

I want to challenge all of us to pray personally more and more, to develop and practice prayer and then to pray with others. Gather with the groups that are praying here. John Newton says "Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring, for His grace and power are such none can ever ask too much." Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You for these humongous promises about prayer. We thank You for these great illustrations in church history and in people's lives of answered prayer. Father, we want to be effective in prayer and apply it to our lives, our families, our church, our nation to the advance of Your cause Lord. Guide us in this. Lead us and direct us in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

I. THE PROMISE STATED (7-8)

A. The Condition (7)

1. What the condition is
2. That it is not the only condition (cf. 6:5)
 - a. You must be a Christian
 - b. James 1:6-7
 - c. James 4:3
 - d. I John 5:14
 - e. John 14: 13-14
 - f. Psalm 66:18
 - g. I John 3:22

B. The Promise (7-8)

II. THE PARALLEL DRAWN (9-11)

A. Between Us and Our Children (9-11a)

B. As Compared to God and His Children (11b)

1. Who are God's children?

2. What He will do (11b)

a. He will give good things (cf Luke 11:13)

b. He will answer according to His wisdom and goodness

III. THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

A. The Problem of Unanswered Prayer

B. The Problem of Praying according to God's Will

C. The Problem of Accepting His Will

CONCLUSION