

OUR FATHER KNOWS BEST

By Daniel A. Surya

Matthew 7:7-11

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Good morning RPC! Our reading for today is taken from Matthew 7:7-11.

Now, if you have been a Christian for a while, you'd know based on your experience that God, our heavenly Father, doesn't always answer your prayers – at least not the way you want Him to.

A friend of mine for 10 years, he and his wife asked God for a child to no avail. It was very difficult for them, especially for his wife. My wife and I have been asking God for just another one (a boy or a girl doesn't matter) but the baby didn't survive. My wife had to experience miscarriages twice.

Some of you may have gone through a similar experience, perhaps something like, *"I prayed for my son and he died."*

So, if you've been a Christian for a while now, you notice that unlike the promise made by Jesus in Mat 7 "Ask, and the gift is yours", God in reality doesn't answer everyone's prayers. Or, answer it with a NO answer.

Think about these examples:

When you hear a person describe an escape from a plane crash, there were people who died in that plane crash many of them prayed just as fervently.

Or, for every Christian cured from cancer, there are hundreds of Christians who prayed just as passionately and not cured.

Can we really credit God for protecting our house from the blaze of fire when our neighbour's house with whom we always pray together has the house completely destroyed by the same fire?

This is the big question: WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT WENT WRONG?

Today I want to offer some possibilities:

1. Some prayers are unanswered because they are simply **thoughtless prayers**. You know, like a little boy who prayed after his geography test: "Please God, make Tokyo the capital of Italy."

Some people do the same thing. They make fun of prayers: "LORD help me get an A on tomorrow's test!" And you've never been studying. The Bible says "don't mock God for you'll reap what you sow."

Or, "Protect me from lung cancer GOD," and you smoke a packet of cigarettes a day.

2. Some prayers are not answered because of wrong motives.

I remember a song by former Rock Star Janis Joplin who sang *"O Lord won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz. My friends all drive Porsches. I must make amends."*

We ask God for things for crazy reasons. James says, "When you ask, you do not receive because you asked with wrong motives." (James 4:3)

3. Some prayers are unanswered because it is logically impossible for God to answer them all.

e.g. 12 people applied for the same job, assuming all prayed, only 1 will get answered. 11 will have to come to term with unanswered prayers.

Or, a soccer player praying for sunshine and a farmer praying for rain in the same area.

There are other reasons:

Lack of faith, unholiness. The prophet Isaiah expressed this truth plainly in chapter 1:15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!

No concern for the poor and the needy. Prov. 21:13 says "Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered."

All that being said, one thing we need to admit: Prayer is a mystery and that's the beauty of it.

However, some prayers in the Bible are not thoughtless, prayed with the right motives, they're not impossible for God to answer, and yet God said NO (e.g. Job, Jesus, Paul, and yet not answered). So, we know this and we probably would have accepted this easier had the Jesus not made a sweeping promise like the passage we just read:

"Ask, and the gift is yours. Seek, and you'll discover. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. For every persistent one will get what he asks for. Every persistent seeker will discover what he longs for. And everyone who knocks persistently will one day find an open door. Do you know any parent who would give his hungry child, who asked for food, a plate of rocks instead? Or when asked for a piece of fish, what parent would offer his child a snake instead?"

If you, imperfect as you are, know how to lovingly take care of your children and give them what's best, how much more ready is your heavenly Father to give wonderful gifts to those who ask him?"

So, what is the main idea here in this passage? The main idea is simply "Ask and you'll get it!" Let me say it again: "Ask and you'll get it!"

In Matt 7:7-8, Jesus said the same thing 3 times: **Ask**, and the gift is yours. **Seek**, and you'll discover. **Knock**, and the door will be opened for you.

Ask - Seek - Knock format is a very common Hebrew poetry.

e.g. A: A false witness shall not be unpunished. B: He that speaks lies shall perish. (Proverbs 19:19). Lesson (from A and B): Lie and you're gonna get it.

Verse 8 is actually another repetition of the same thing said in a different way: "For every persistent one will get what he asks for. Every persistent seeker will discover what he longs for. And everyone who knocks persistently will one day find an open door."

So, Jesus said the same thing 6 times. Even though verses 7 and 8 said "Ask, seek, knock" the emphasis is only one: ASK! Because that's what is repeated here. What Jesus is saying is: **your requests will not disappoint you, what you ask will be given to you.**

If that is so, why is it then, when we ask, we are not always given. When we seek, we don't always find, and when we knock, the door is not only not opened, it's shut right in our face?

The clue to that answer is in verses 9-11. There Jesus told us what it means to ask, and the gift is yours. Seek, and you'll discover. Knock, and the door will be opened for you.

Here's the clue, see if you catch it.

"Do you know any parent who would give his hungry child, who asked for food, a plate of rocks instead? Or when asked for a piece of fish, what parent would offer his child a snake instead? If you, imperfect as you are, know how to lovingly take care of your children and give them what's best, how much more ready is your heavenly Father to give wonderful gifts to those who ask him?"

From Jesus' example above, we can conclude there are three different kinds of parent or father in this regard. Let's go through the different possibilities (see the slide now).

FATHER WHO GIVES ONLY THE BAD THINGS. Doesn't matter what the child asks.... If the child asks for bread; he will give a stone; If he asks for a fish, he will give a snake. [It's unlikely Jesus said but it's possible]

FATHER WHO GIVES EVERYTHING THAT IS ASKED. If the child asks for bread; he will get bread; ask for a fish, he will give a fish, and if he asks for a snake; he will actually give a snake. So, whatever the child asks, the child gets.

FATHER WHO GIVES ONLY THE GOOD THINGS. If the child asks for bread; he will get bread; if he asks for a fish, he will get a fish, But if he asks for a snake; a good father will not listen but instead give a fish.

Now, let me ask you: which one of these different types of father do you think is the best one?

How many of you think Father 1 is the best? WHO GIVES ONLY BAD

How many of you think Father 2 is the best? WHO GIVES WHATEVER

How many of you think Father 3 is the best? ..GIVES ONLY GOOD

(Assuming that the congregation would answer "Father 3") – Are you sure? I disagree. I disagree that Father 3 is the best. I think the answer is: it depends :)

It depends on whom you ask.

See, when I asked you this question, You're answering from the Father's perspective (from the parent's perspective).

But if I get children from the kids church here and ask them the same question, which father is best, which do you think they'll say the best Father is? Father 2: "My dad is cool. He gives me whatever I'm asking!"

That's why parents and children often have these clashes because they differ on what they believe is good. **To children, permission is good; to parents some sort of control is good.**

The real conflict usually happens because we see things from different perspectives. Let's look at some of these different perspectives.

E.g. **NOW vs LATER:** To the children, NOW is good. They don't really care about tomorrow or what will happen in the future. That's what my dad always says **"What do you want to be when you grow up?"**

SHORT TERM vs LONG TERM: My dad used to tell me: “Son, don’t procrastinate, hard work pays off after time.” And I used to reply (in my heart), “Yeah dad, but laziness pays off now!”

To children, GOOD is whatever gives them happiness in the short term. As long as I’m happy for the next 2 hours...who cares what happens in 20 yrs?

KAIROS vs CHRONOS: TIME vs OPPORTUNITY.

Parents always see things in terms of opportunity. “You can play anytime you want... but opportunity might never come again.” Illus: If I have to live my life over: I would’ve learned English better.

But that’s my thinking NOW. When I was a kid, I didn’t think that **“Time to play cannot interfere with time to study.”** I thought the exact opposite. **“Time to study cannot interfere with time to play.”** That’s why I cut school, I hardly ever come home straight from school. Now, if I could turn back time, I would ask my dad for English lessons, piano lessons, math tutors, etc.

Now you see that what a child thinks is good usually is not good for the parents, and what the parents think is good is usually not good for the child.

So, verses 9-11 not only qualifies what Jesus said in verses 7-8, but it also gives you and I confidence in our prayers. What confidence? **That you and I have a good Father who only gives you good things.**

Verse 11: If you, imperfect as you are, know how to lovingly take care of your children and give them what’s best, how much more ready is your heavenly Father to give wonderful gifts to those who ask him?

This is also known as the argument from the lesser to the greater.

Now, how does this affect your relationship with God? How does this affect your prayer life?

1. You need to pray because Jesus told us to ask. Assumption is: because not everything is decided yet. E.g. Sodom and Gomorrah. NINEVEH.

2. Next time you pray: align your perspective. When we pray to God do we often ask for Bread or Stone? Do we ask for fish or snakes? Seriously.

To us, often stone is really bread; snake is really fish. Why? Because we make ourselves the standard of what is good.

INSTEAD we gotta make God the standard of goodness. God understands everything we don't.

SELF vs KINGDOM. Matthew 7 is part of what is known as the sermon on the Mount which talks about kingdom lifestyle. That's why Seek first the kingdom of God. When you pray: Your kingdom comes, your will be done. We also should rethink our concept of what's not good. **Is good = pleasant? Not always. Broccoli is good but I'd rather eat steak.**

PAIN is not good; **DISCIPLINE** is not good. **HARD WORK** is not good; **PERSEVERANCE** is not good; **FORGIVING** someone is not good; but a little child couldn't understand this.

CONCLUSION:

So, when you pray and God doesn't answer you the way you want it, believe that God is your good heavenly Father who knows what's best for you. Maybe what you're asking for is not good for you. Maybe it's not the right time yet. Our Father has ALL the perspectives that we don't have. So trust him!

E.g. When my son Ben was in hospital, when he was little, the nurse had to inject a needle for his immunization. So, I helped the nurse to hold my son and he was angry with me for helping a stranger to hurt him. To Ben at that point I was a bad Father because he doesn't have my perspective of trying to help him.

Our Father has ALL the perspectives that we don't have. So trust him! Because our Father Knows Best!