

Matthew 7:7-11 *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 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 what is good to those who ask him?

THE ROYAL INVITATION

Was there ever a more ROYAL INVITATION than this? Ask, seek, knock and you will receive, find and have the door opened to you. I am your heavenly Father who loves you, will never deceive you, but will only give what is best for you. Wow – what a promise!

If there is any rival to this glorious royal invitation, it would be this, when Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28-30 *Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Both invitations are for divine provision – this latter one for spiritual “rest, aimed primarily at those who yet do not know Him or for those weary in the spiritual battle. However, the royal invitation of today’s passage is aimed at kingdom citizens who particularly long for spiritual wisdom and direction. They are both for the taking! After all, we ever need both spiritual rest and spiritual wisdom.

OUR PASSAGE IN CONTEXT

Our passage of the day is often taken out of context – and truly it satisfies and performs out of context as a marvelous promise of God’s provision of wisdom in all circumstances. But we must never forget that context is critical. Jesus has been speaking of being careful to discern rightly – not condemning others but desiring to help them with the sin “in their eye” as long as we rightly discern and deal with the sin in our own life first. And most recently he has taught us to judge, or discern, those who would not receive the “pearl” of our glorious Lord Jesus with favor, and to not force this truth upon them – at least, not at this time of their resistance. And to these teachings we would be right to respond, “Who Lord is able?” Well, we need wisdom from above, and so in context, Jesus gives His response of “ask, seek and knock” that we might receive the wisdom we need to rightly judge.

ASK

How often we males have been accused of not asking for directions, thinking we figure it out on our own. And often females are accused of not asking for help of those who might be physically stronger because they want to maintain the image of equality in all things. To this point James, the earthly brother of Jesus, nailed it when he said:

James 4:2b *You do not have because you do not ask.*

Jesus is teaching that the first step to spiritual wisdom is to ask for it. Ask – don’t assume that it will be given. Asking involves humbling ourselves enough to acknowledge our lack of knowing and need of assistance. This is why God calls us to pray. He knows our need and could give without our asking, but He wants us to acknowledge our need of Him. This teaching is mirroring the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus taught that blessed are the poor in Spirit, those who mourn over their sin, are aware of their meekness and hunger for God’s intervention of righteousness. Ask! James goes on to teach yet another important principle of asking:

James 4:3 *You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

In our asking, let us be sure that we are asking with God's kingdom in mind, and not our own self-interest. Our motive must always be: "Thy will be done."

SEEK

Seeking is similar to asking, but it involves activity on our part beyond the prayerful words. Therefore, I see seeking as ASKING + ACTING. Here God is asking me to act on the prayer that I make in doing all I can to partner with God. He wants me to know that He is not a "magic genie" that I can simply rub to achieve my wants, but One with whom I am to partner in active engagement to seek after that which I desire. He is the One who will bring about my spiritual wisdom, but I must engage my mind and body that He might work through me. Deuteronomy 4:29 is helpful at this point.

Deuteronomy 4:29 ... *You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul.*

KNOCK

And knocking seems to convey yet a more persistent and specific asking and seeking. So I suggest that knocking is ASKING + ACTING + PERSISTING. This is made even more clear when we compare our passage to Luke's parallel passage in Luke 11. In verses 9-13 He has the Matthew 7:7-11 passage almost word for word, with ask, seek and knock and the rest. But preceding this portion Jesus relates this story in verses 5-8:

Luke 11:5-8 *Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him." And from inside he answers and says, "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." I tell you ... because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.*

Luke then goes on to record Jesus as saying: "So I say to you, ask ... (seek, knock)" showing that these commands are connected to the concept of persevering in our asking and seeking. The implication is that we are to "knock" in prayer until the door to our need is opened.

Have you noticed that your prayer of asking is not always answered immediately. Sometimes yes, but more than often it seems that God takes us to the "last moment" or to the "end of the limb" on which we are hanging before the answer comes. In this, He is teaching persistence. There would be no need for persistence with always immediate answers. God is testing our faith and trust!

THE RESTATEMENT

In Matthew 7:12 we have what seems to be a restatement of the "ask, seek, knock" command.

Matthew 7:12 *For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

But upon closer examination we notice that this statement is from the perspective of the giver, rather than the receiver. In other words, this restatement is emphasizing the receiving, finding and open door that God so graciously gives. Wisdom is given. Good judgment and discernment is granted. The "light bulb" of what to do comes on. It only took the acknowledgment of my need by asking and my subsequent acting on that in persistent trust. This corresponds to James' similar teaching.

James 1:5-6a *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting ...*

Have you noticed that the acronym for ASK, SEEK & KNOCK would be ... A.S.K. If you think of it this way, to ASK is to encompass asking, seeking and knocking.

THE GOOD FATHER

"You're a good, good Father – it's who you are" the song says – and so do verses 9-11. Jesus appeals to our reason, reasoning from the lesser to the greater, as He does so often. Isaiah in 1:18 bids "Come let us reason together ... though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow." In

similar fashion Jesus says essentially, “come let us reason together ... if an earthly, unbelieving father knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more will God our Father give good gifts.”

And this makes sense to us. An earthly father would not DECEIVE his child, giving him a snake to eat instead of the fish he desires.

So **(1) God does not deceive.** No “bait and switch” with God. Only love and good is given. You can count on it – even if what we receive is not immediately perceptible as good. We usually don’t want “no” answers to our wants, but we can be sure that a “no” answer is a good thing given by God – either to protect from some unseen problem, or to wait for a better gift to come.

(2) God doesn’t give “junk.” No stones or snakes with God – those kind of gifts come from the pit of hell. God gives gifts that encourage, help, satisfy and reward. Earthly fathers usually give good gifts, but being less than perfect sometimes make mistakes. Never so with God – no mistakes and only good. In fact God’s gifts are not only “good,” they are perfect. Again referring to James:

James 1:18 *Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom where is no variation or shifting shadow.*

The “no variation or shifting shadow” refers to no imperfection or hint of wrong. God’s gifts are perfect. Your spouse is “perfect” for you. Your children are “perfect” for you. Your parents and heritage are “perfect” for you. Your talents and abilities are “perfect” for you. Question that logic and you will arrive at questioning the very goodness of God.

When we are discontented with our lot in life and don’t like who we are we are questioning the good gifts of God. Now surely we can mess up our lot in life by making dumb choices. But what God has made us and given us is perfect. Know that for a fact and rejoice in it. This acknowledgment will save you much grief and second-guessing. He’s a good Father. Always.

THE GREATEST GIFT

So God will give us the good gift of whatever we ask, seek and knock for. So what should we ask for? Magic genies are supposed to grant three wishes. If God only granted one gift, for what should we as His kingdom citizens ask? Well, the parallel passage in Luke makes it clear. I said earlier that Luke 11:9-13 says “almost word for word” what Matthew 7:7-11 says. But there is one significant difference and addition that should greatly clarify and affect our asking, seeking and knocking.

Luke 11:13 *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*

Do you see it? Sure you do. The greatest gift we can ask of our Heavenly Father is the perfect gift of the Holy Spirit. You might say all Christians already have the Holy Spirit. True – in that the Spirit lives within every believer (Romans 8:9), but because of sin we quench, grieve and fail to be “filled” with the fullness of the Spirit flowing through us. And that is what we are to ask for, seek and knock for with persistence.

You say love is the greatest gift? You have that and more with the Holy Spirit. You say wisdom is what you seek? You have that and more with the Holy Spirit. He is God Himself with all the perfect character and abilities of God. We have access to all this if we will only “get ourselves out of the way.” I like the way Peter said it:

2 Peter 1:3-4 *... seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence ... so that you may become partakers of the divine nature ...*

THE FINAL ANALYSIS

In summary,

1. Asking God in faith coupled with self-effort and persistence will be rewarded
2. God will never deceive, but only give what is perfectly good
3. The ultimate good gift is the Holy Spirit of wisdom and perfect responsiveness to every situation

So, A.S.K. = ASK, SEEK and KNOCK and watch for the miracles of good!