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Learning how to

# **talk to God**

from the great prayers of the Bible

## **Permission to Ask**

**Matthew 7:7-11**

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia  
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## PERMISSION TO ASK

### Matthew 7:7-11

Some of the funniest, most honest, and most curious prayers come from children. Here are a few sentence prayers some children wrote to God.

- Lauren – “Dear God, are you really invisible or is it just a trick?”
- Charlie – “Dear God, I bet it’s really hard for you to love everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in my family and I can’t do it.”
- Katie – “Dear God, did you mean for giraffes to look like that or was it an accident?”
- Abbie – “Dear God, I need you to make my mom not allergic to cats. I really want a cat and I don’t want to ask my mom to move out.”
- Michael – “Dear God, please send Dennis Clark to a different camp this summer.”
- Jamie – “Dear God, thank you for the baby brother but I asked for a puppy. You can look it up.”
- Stephen – “Dear God, please take care of my dad, my mom, my sister and brother, my dog, and me. And please take care of yourself. If anything happens to you, we’re in a big mess.”

The power of prayer became a reality to me when I was 10 years old and headed into 5th grade. My 5th grade teacher was to be Mrs. Rogers, and my brother and my sister warned me how strict and tough and old and mean Mrs. Rogers was as a teacher. I was so scared that all summer I prayed, “Oh Lord, please don’t let Mrs. Rogers be my teacher!” And that summer, Mrs. Rogers died! And I thought it was my fault. After that, I was scared to pray! Jesus said, “Ask Me for anything, and I will do it.” And I realized the power of prayer was too much for any 10-year-old boy to handle.

This summer, we’re in series on prayer, *learning how to talk to God from the great prayers of the Bible*. The majestic creator of the universe has invited us to talk to Him. Prayer is the wonderful gift of experiencing a relationship with God and having a conversation with Him. This invitation to pray proves how much God loves us and cares about us. It’s permission to cry out to Him for help anytime about anything. And it really makes a difference. Prayer makes a difference because He promises to listen and He promises to respond.

We see this invitation throughout the Bible. God invites us to talk to Him.

- “Call to Me and I will answer you” (Jeremiah 33:3, NAS).
- “Call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you” (Jeremiah 29:12, ESV).

- “You shall call, and the Lord will answer. You shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am’” (Isaiah 58:9, ESV).
- “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears” (Psalm 34:17, ESV).

And Jesus gives us permission to ask, to ask for whatever we need.

- “This is the confidence we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us ... and will give us what we ask for” (1 John 5:14-15, NAS).
- “You can pray for anything,” Jesus said, “and if you have faith, you will receive it” (Matthew 21:22, NLT).
- Jesus said, “You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!” (John 14:13-14, NLT).
- “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7, NAS).

And if we’re still not convinced, in His great sermon on the mount, Jesus said, “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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. You parents, if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So 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” (Matthew 7:7-11).

If the Bible contained only one promise regarding prayer, we might be tempted to think Jesus didn’t really mean it. But there are too many promises to ignore. So, what are these promises worth? They are worth the character of the one who made them. And who made them? The Son of God. His character backs up His promises. He will and He must be faithful to His promises. The Bible asks, “Has He ever spoken and failed to act? Has He ever promised and not carried it through?” (Numbers 23:19, NLT). And the Scripture answers, “He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

If all of this is true, if Jesus really meant it, then why don’t we pray more? He invites us to ask, and He promises to hear us and answer us. So why don’t we take advantage of this incredible invitation? One reason is self-reliance. We think we can handle life without God. So we rely on self, on money, and how smart we are. Another reason we don’t pray is a lack of faith. Perhaps we’ve tried and it didn’t work, so we stop praying.

Yet the invitation still stands. Jesus said, “Ask, and you will receive” (Matthew 7:7). Do we believe Him or not?

George Mueller believed Him. Mueller was one of the greatest men of prayer who ever lived. He lived in England from 1805–1898. During his lifetime, he cared for over 10,000 orphans and established 117 schools providing Christian education to more than 120,000 children. He

distributed over 2 million Bibles and pieces of Christian literature. And he never asked for money, he simply prayed.<sup>1</sup> “No matter how great their want, Mueller and (his wife) Mary simply prayed.”<sup>2</sup> And like daily manna from heaven, just at the right moment, God always provided. Mueller was called “the man who got things from God.”<sup>3</sup>

In his prayer journal, George Mueller recorded 50,000 answers to prayer over his lifetime. He possessed a tenacious faith in God and believed God would provide everything he needed when he needed it. He was specific in his praying, praying for milk and food, for furniture and beds, for clothing for the children, and for money to pay the bills. He was also tenacious about seeking God’s will. He believed if his heart was aligned with God’s heart, and if he desired and discerned God’s will, then certainly God would provide. Mueller often said in his journals that every day he woke up penniless, and yet everything was provided before the day was over.

During his lifetime of ministry, Mueller raised some £1.5 million or \$120 million in today’s currency.<sup>4</sup> At age 71, Mueller and his wife began a 17-year journey traveling the world as missionaries. When he died in 1898, his funeral was attended by 10,000 people, including 1,500 children from orphanages he established.

He once wrote, “The joy which answers to prayer give cannot be described.”<sup>5</sup> And that’s exactly what Jesus promised. “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24, ESV). In his journal, dated May 26, 1861, Mueller reminisced on God’s many provisions, and simply wrote, “He has never failed us.”<sup>6</sup> And twenty years later, in that same prayer journal, he wrote, “In every trial and difficulty, I find prayer and faith to be the universal remedy. And after having experienced his faithfulness for over 50 years, I am determined, with his help, to continue waiting on him, to show an ungodly world and a doubting church that the living God is still able and willing to answer prayer.”<sup>7</sup>

George Mueller believed Jesus meant it when He said, “Ask, and you will receive” (Matthew 7:7).

## THE LORD’S PRAYER

We find this invitation to ask in the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus taught the disciples, and teaches us, to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). Jesus gives us permission to ask for anything we need. Jesus said, “Pray like this ... Give us this day our daily bread.” Three truths come from that phrase. (1) We are totally *dependent* on God for everything we need. (2) We can *ask* God for anything we need. (3) We can trust God to *provide* all we need.

Jesus made it clear that ***we are totally DEPENDENT on God for everything we need.***

In the first century, Roman governors and soldiers occupied Israel and Jews were oppressed. It was hard to make a living and it was hard to provide food for a family. Most people were day laborers, hired and paid by the day. So the concept of “daily bread” was common. And when a family lives near poverty, all they think about is having enough food for the day. People were literally begging God to give them their daily bread.

Centuries earlier, after the Lord delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, they wandered in the desert for forty years. Each day, God provided manna, or daily bread, and He provided only enough for one day. So the Hebrews had to trust Him to provide day after day after day.

In Deuteronomy 8, Moses explained the Lord's intent to the people. "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna ... to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord ... ***Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God*** ... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery ... You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth."

While we take pride in our hard work, having a good job, and providing for our families, we must acknowledge there is a greater truth at play. When we have money in the bank and go to the grocery store and buy all the food we want, it's easy to forget. We are totally ***dependent*** on God for everything we need.

Prayer is not just for spiritual matters, however we define spiritual. Jesus invites us to pray for our personal, physical, and essential needs. Praying for daily bread means nothing is too small or trivial to bring to our Father.

In Matthew 6, Jesus said, "I tell you not to worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? ... So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and ***he will give you everything you need.***"

We are totally ***dependent*** on God and He promises to provide everything we need.

"Give us this day our daily bread" also means that ***we can ASK God for anything we need.***

Theologian J. I. Packer writes, "At the core," when people bend their knees and cry out to God, "prayer is asking."<sup>8</sup> Prayer is asking God to do something for us. And we have an invitation to ask. We have permission to ask. It could not be clearer.

Again Matthew 7, Jesus said, "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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. You parents, if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course

not! So 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” (Matthew 7:7-11).

Jesus invites us to ask but He also insists that we align our hearts with Him before we ask anything from Him. He said, “I will do whatever you ask *in my name*, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:13-14, NIV). That does not mean attaching His name to the end of a prayer. It means we have access and freedom to go to God because of our standing in Christ. We come to God with our requests because Jesus has made it possible.

It also means asking for things Jesus approves. The Apostle John repeated this principle, when he said, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God, that *if we ask anything according to His will*, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15, NIV). If our desires are submitted to His will, if our hearts are aligned with His heart, it’s guaranteed.

Again, Jesus invites us to ask. We can *ask* God for anything we need.

Three truths come from the phrase “give us this day our daily bread.” We are totally *dependent* on God for everything we need. We can *ask* God for anything we need. *And we can trust God to PROVIDE all we need.*<sup>9</sup>

J. I. Packer writes, “We have nothing and have never had anything that we have not received, nor have we done anything good apart from God who did it through us. In ourselves we are destitute, bankrupt and impotent, totally dependent on God in every way.”<sup>10</sup>

David believed that. He said, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1, NAS). He said, “Lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Psalm 34:10, NIV).<sup>11</sup> David said, “I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or His children begging for bread” (Psalm 37:25, ESV).

Jesus said, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and *all these things* will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). Paul added, “My God will supply *all your needs* according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Paul also said, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us *all things*?” (Romans 8:32). If the Father gave His Son, then there is nothing He won’t give. We can trust God to *provide* all we need.<sup>12</sup>

Paul believed God would provide when he said, “I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength ... And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever!” (Philippians 4:11-13, 19-20, NLT).

Because He is our Father and takes responsibility for us ... because He is good, compassionate, and loving ... because He has promised ... we can trust Him to provide everything we need.

### CONCLUSION

Jesus gives us permission to ask. “Give us this day our daily bread.” Three truths come from that phrase. (1) We are totally *dependent* on God for everything we need. (2) We can *ask* God for anything we need. (3) We can trust God to *provide* all we need.

One more time, let the promise and the invitation of Jesus sink in.

“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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8). Jesus said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you” – if you surrender to Me, if you align your heart with Me, if you are in relationship with Me – “ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7, NAS).

**[PRAYER TIME]** Do you believe Him? If you do, then ask!

What do you need? What do you really need? What burden do you need Him to lift? What problem do you need Him to solve? What heartache do you need Him to comfort? What do you want to happen and to come true in your life? Whatever you need, Jesus said, “Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> George Mueller, compiled by A.E.C. Brooks, *Answers to Prayer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), page 28

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., page 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., page 14.

<sup>4</sup> His autobiography is titled “Autobiography of George Mueller, or A Million and A Half in Answer to Prayer.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pages 79, 104.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pages 112-113.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., page 119, MW paraphrase.

<sup>8</sup> J. I. Packer, *Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), page 149.

<sup>9</sup> When the Lord asked Abraham to go the mountain and sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, he went. Along the journey, Abraham told Isaac that the Lord would provide a lamb for the sacrifice. Abraham trusted God every step he took up that mountain. Abraham went so far as to tie up Isaac and raise his knife in obedience to the Lord. And at that moment, when Abraham provided his obedience, the Lord provided the lamb. And Abraham named that place “the Lord will provide,” or as we also know as Jehovah-Jireh.

<sup>10</sup> Packer, *Prayer*, page 147.

<sup>11</sup> See also Psalm 84:11.

<sup>12</sup> So, when Jesus promises to provide everything we need, John Piper helps us understand the bigger picture, the complete picture. “I think it means this. Everything will be given to us that we need in order to do God’s will in order to glorify God most fully, even if it means death. Jesus is not promising all the food, all the clothing, all the housing, all the healthcare, all the protection that we need to be comfortable ... He is promising that we will have everything we need in exactly the right measure for doing His will and glorifying His name.” [John Piper, “Does God Promise to Feed and Clothe Christians?” Desiring God radio, [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org).]