PROVIDING FATHER

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking and you will find; keep knocking and the door will be opened. For everyone asking receives; the one seeking finds; and for the one knocking the door will be opened. There is no one among you who when a son or daughter asks for bread will give a stone, is there? And there is no one who will give a snake to a child who asks for a fish, is there? Well, then, if even you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more is it true that your heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him?"
Matthew 7:7-11

The first thing to note in the structure of this passage is the continuity revealing the continuous action. The passage begins and ends with the idea of *"asking."* Within the passage that same verb of *"ask"* or *"asking"* presents itself in all five verses.

The verb *"ask"* serves as a petition. The one *"asking"* is in need of the *"provision"* that another can provide.

Though there appears to be little that connects this passage to the ones preceding it, I believe this idea of *"asking"* can provide us with a link that serves to point to God as the One who can meet the needs of the petitioner.

In Matthew 6:11 the disciple asks God to provide daily bread.

In Matthew 6:12 the disciple asks God to forgive.

In Matthew 6:13 the disciple asks God to keep them from temptation and to deliver them from evil.

In Matthew 6:19-24 the disciple is in effect asking God to maintain their desire to lay up treasure in heaven.

In Matthew 6:25-34 the disciple seeks peace against anxiety.

In Matthew 7:7-11 the disciple asks, seeks, and knocks for God to provide good things.

Matthew sets up this passage in relation to petitioning God to provide. Luke, in a parallel form, sets up this passage in relation to prayer. Both, however, in effect, place this petition of *asking, seeking,* and *knocking* after Jesus teaches the disciples about praying.

5And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, 6for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? 8I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 9And I tell you, ask, and it will be given

*to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **10**For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. **11**What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; **12**or if he asks for an egg, will give him 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!"* *Luke 11:5-13*

Note that whereas

Matthew first parallels *bread / stone*, Luke parallels *fish / serpent.*
Matthew then parallels *snake / fish*, Luke parallels *egg / scorpion.*

The difference here can only be speculated. If Matthew and Luke are using the same source material (possibly Q), Matthew may have added the *bread / stone* wording since *bread* was a staple food and Matthew may have wanted to connect this passage to the one he used earlier regarding *bread* when Jesus was hungry while fasting and trusting God for provision.

And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to be come loaves of bread." But he answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"
Matthew 4:3-4

This connection makes sense in Matthew's narrative since in each case God is the focus of the provision being sought for.

Of course, the variations between Matthew and Luke could represent two independent oral traditions that trace back to the same original *"saying."*

Matthew also uses the phrase *"good things"* whereas Luke uses the *"Holy Spirit."*

how much more is it true that heavenly Father will good things to those who ask him?"

how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Given Luke's authorship of Acts, he may have used *"Holy Spirit"* in preparation of the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost in the ultimate provision by God on behalf of the disciple.

Note once again Matthew's tri-formulaic use of threes in this petition: *ask, seek, knock.*

The passage beings with these 3 actions in vv.7-8;
followed by 2 examples of human faithfulness concerning their children in vv.9-10;
followed by an argument supporting the faithfulness of 1 Father.

This passage also uses the parallelism that we have found so often in the Sermon on the Mount.

The three present tense imperatives of *ask, seek,* and *knock* are immediately followed by three results that are expressed in the future tense whose importance we will address later.

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you;
keep seeking and you will find;
keep knocking and the door will be opened

This pericope begins with an *ask* and ends with an *ask,* thus serving as bookends with an answer being given to the question.

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you;
will give good things to those who ask him?"

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking and you will find; keep knocking and the door will be opened. For everyone asking receives; the one seeking finds; and for the one knocking the door will be opened.
Matthew 7:7-8

There are three imperatives given in v.7 – *ask, seek, knock.*

There are three participles given in v.8 – *everyone who asks, the one who seeks, the one who knocks.*

All three describe the same activity. Note that no object to these activities is specified.

We are not told what the request being made is nor are we told what to seek or that for which one knocks. The invitation to *ask, seek,* and *knock* is apparently as broad as the questions we find in vv.9-10 regarding what one would give their children.

What we do see is that the object to the activity of asking, seeking, and knocking is as general and ambiguous as the *"good things"* mentioned in v.11.

Ultimately, since the Kingdom has been inaugurated with the coming of Christ, the *"good things"* could refer to the eschatological or eternal blessings that accompany the presence of the Kingdom.

Running parallel with this but also possibly independent of it could be the option validated by Luke's use of *"Holy Spirit"* in place of Matthew's *"good things"* which places an emphasis on the disciple proclaiming the Kingdom. When people are receptive to this proclamation, they may receive the Holy Spirit.

A third option is that the *"good things"* are the ordinary and daily needs of the disciples.

A fourth option is that the *"good things"* are the qualities of character and life demanded by the sermon such as *righteousness, humility, purity, love.*

Perhaps however, the passage does not emphasize the *"good things"* themselves but rather the *"faithfulness of the Father"* in making provision for his people's needs.

The passive verbs *"it will be given"* and *"it will be opened"* are divine passives which indicate that God is the one who will give and who will open the door.

As we have seen already, both Matthew and Luke agree on the continuous activity.

"Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking and you will find; keep knocking and the door will be opened.

I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence (persistence) he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

"Let him who seeks not cease until he finds."
Clement, Stromata 5.14.96.3

Jesus said, "Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds; and when he finds he will be troubled, and when he is troubled he will be amazed, and he will reign over All."
Gospel of Thomas 2

For everyone asking receives – the *everyone* mentioned here are those who participate in the Kingdom as disciples of the King.

In v. 7 all the promises are in the future tense whereas v. 8 contains two present tense verbs *"receives"* and *"finds"* indicating the reality of the promises for the present.

Interesting to note here is that the promises are not conditional as they are in Matthew 21:22.

"And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

The faithfulness of God in answering prayer is found in the Old Testament.

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:13

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.
Proverbs 8:17

Even, however, given all of this, the statements of Jesus have a unique quality about them. This comes from the very context of his teachings and the fact that he is announcing the inauguration of the Kingdom.

There is no one among who when a son or daughter asks for bread will give a stone, is there? And there is no one who will give a snake to a child who asks for a fish, is there?
Matthew 7:9-10

These are rhetorical questions that expect no answer but prompt thought. When a child asks for some bread or for a fish, no parent would give him a stone or a snake.

The request by the child here involves food items. What this tells us is that nothing miraculous is intended in the request, nothing that requires faith, but rather the basic necessities of life.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" and Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive. If you have faith."
Matthew 21:20-22

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."
Matthew 6:31-32

Even if we speculate that round stones can be similar in appearance to a loaf of bread and that a snake may resemble a fish, the point is not in these specific items. It is instead, in this case, found in the faithful provision of the parents.

Well, then, if even you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more is it true that heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him?"
Matthew 7:7-11

We must concede here that human parents give *"good gifts"* to their children. They know how to do this even though they are *evil (pon-a-ros)*, meaning sinful or evil.

Pon-a-ros in the physical sense means *diseased* or *blind.*

Pon-a-ros in the ethical sense means *evil* or *wicked.*

The word carries the idea of one who is *hurtful*. Other Greek words for evil focus on the poor quality of something whereas, *pon-a-ros* specifically speaks of *active, aggressive evil that causes pain, trouble, and destruction.*

Pon-a-ros occurs far more often in Matthew (26 times) than any other New Testament writing. It presupposes all members of the human family, especially when compared, as it is here, to the *righteousness and goodness of the Father* who is in heaven.

Note here that the *"good things"* God gives are parallel to the *"good gifts"* given by the human parents.

Here Matthew does not preserve the parallelism with the giving of the parents by having the Father *"give good things to his children"*, but rather only *"to those who ask him."*

By doing this and as we noted earlier, Matthew forms inclusive bookends concerning the *providing Father* with the use of the active verb *"asking"* or *"ask"* and by the action of the words *"it will be given to you"* and *"will give good things to those who ask."*

"Keep <u>asking</u>, and it will be given to you;
your heavenly Father will give good things to those who <u>ask</u> him?"

Jesus here invites his disciples to rely upon the faithfulness of their heavenly Father . . . the disciples may confidently trust in God. Much more than parents, who reliably provide their children with what they need, will their heavenly Father provide the disciples with that for which they ask. The ultimate scope of the passage need not entail the expectation that every request will be answered positively; it points rather to the basic principle of God's comprehensive and faithful care of the disciple. The "good things" cover certainly the ongoing needs of the disciples, but in the larger context of the Gospel, they suggest also the blessings of the kingdom. The passage focuses on the answering, providing Father. It is he who provides the material blessings of the present age as well as the transcendent blessings connected with coming kingdom of God.
Hagner – Matthew, page 175