

TEACH ME TO PRAY

MATTHEW 7:7-11

THE DOOR



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Children, have you ever been afraid to ask your Dad for something? Let's just say it's an iPhone. You really want it, in fact, you really need it. But you're scared to ask. You're scared because you're afraid of how your Dad may react. Will he ignore you? Will he be angry at you? Will he call you discontented and never satisfied with the Tracfone he's already given you? Will he say, "Have you any idea how much an iPhone costs? How did you ever think we could afford that right now?" You're afraid to ask because of the way your Father may say "No!"

Or, if you're a really wise child, you will be afraid to ask because you're not sure you're ready for it. You've seen the damage iPhones have done to other kids and you're afraid that might happen to you too if you get one. What if your Dad's too busy to really think through the dangers and lets you one without preparing you for it? You're afraid to ask because of the way your Father may say "Yes!"

Both fears—the fear of how your Dad will react and the fear of how you will react—paralyze your knocking and silence your asking. Similar fears can come into our prayers, as we wonder about **"What can I ask my heavenly Father for?"** You have a need or a desire but you're afraid to ask God for it because you're scared about how he may react. Or you're scared that he may give you what you ask for and it may turn out to be a bad thing for you.

Jesus knew our fears about prayer and therefore gave us Matthew 7:7-11 to remove our fears of a painful "No" and a painful "Yes."

BACKGROUND

Last week we heard the Lord knocking on our door (Revelation 3:20). This week we are knocking on the Lord's door. Last week's door-knocking expressed the Lord's desire to fellowship with us over supper. This week's door-knocking expresses our desire for the Lord's help in our daily lives.



"What can I ask my heavenly Father for?"
What do you ask your earthly father for?



1. BAD FATHERS KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO THEIR CHILDREN

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children (Matt. 7:11).

Earthly fathers are "evil"

The best earthly father is still a sinner. All fathers were born in sin, lived lives of sin, still sin, and will sin for as long as they live. In that sense, they are "evil." Two of the ways in which that "evil" can appear in connection with providing for their children is in self-centeredness and impatience.

Like all people, earthly fathers struggle with the selfishness and self-centeredness that makes them live for themselves rather than their wives and children. They can be reluctant to spend money on their children, money that could be spent on themselves and their interests.

Earthly fathers can also battle impatience with their children's requests. "If my son asks me one more time for a puppy, I'm going to murder a puppy!" "If my daughter asks me again for a new iPhone to replace her Tracfone, I'm going to flush her phone down the toilet!"

Earthly fathers know how to give good gifts

Yet, despite the innate sinfulness of our earthly fathers, in general they know how to give good gifts to their children. That doesn't mean they give them everything they want, but rather they give them gifts that will do them good rather than harm. They don't always get that right. Sometimes they give what they thought was a good gift, but it turns out to be harmful. Sometimes they hold back giving something because they fear it will harm them, but their fear is unfounded.

In general though, God has given earthly fathers an instinct to give good gifts to their children. Fathers on the whole, are able to deny themselves to provide for their families, and they patiently bear with their children's direct and subtle requests for gifts. Their default is to give, to give good, and to give when their children ask. As Jesus observed "Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?" (10). The instinct to give good gifts to their children is God-given and God-like.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Fathers, let's confess our sin. Admit that we are not perfect. Acknowledge that our selfishness and impatience sometimes gets the better of us. Confess, even to our children, that we are sinners and that we don't reflect our heavenly Father.

Children, let's praise our Father for our father. Although the best father is a sinner, yet, we shouldn't focus entirely on his negatives and failures. Praise God for every time they sacrificed themselves for our good, gave up money they could have spent on themselves to spend it on you, and considered your requests with patience, grace, and generosity. If your Father was more evil than good, more selfish than unselfish, more impatient than patient, then you were not treated right. If you got a stone when you asked for bread, a serpent when you asked for fish then that was evil and wrong. If you got evil treatment from your father when you should have got good gifts, then God abhors that distortion of his order and his image. He is the father of the fatherless (Ps. 68:5).

BAD DADS KNOW HOW
TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS

How does this help me with prayer?



2. THE BEST FATHER KNOWS HOW TO GIVE THE BEST GIFTS TO HIS CHILDREN

How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matt. 7:11).

Our heavenly Father is good

However good our earthly father is or was, our heavenly Father is much better. He is the most unselfish and patient Father we could ever imagine. Everything he does is for the good of his children. He has never run out of patience with his children's requests. He is perfect in every way without any shadow side. He has perfect goodness meaning he is the most generous person anywhere. He has perfect wisdom, meaning that he knows exactly what will do the most good to each of his children. He has perfect power, meaning he not only wants to give good gifts, he can do it too. He has perfect patience, meaning we can bring the most ridiculous requests and the most repeated requests and he won't be angry with us.

Our heavenly Father knows best how to give the best gifts

Our heavenly Father's gift-giving expertise means that he gives the right gifts, in the right quantity, to the right child at the right time, and it always turns out right. He has such a perfect Fatherly instinct that he knows what to give before we know what we need (Matt 6:8). He has never given a gift he regretted. He's never made a mistake in giving the wrong gift to the wrong child. He's never given too much or too little. He's never given at the wrong time. He's never run out of patience with our requests. He's never given one child a stone when he asked for bread, or a snake when he asked for a fish. He is the perfect Father with the perfect fatherly instinct. His default is to give, and to give good gifts. He's constantly looking for opportunities to give. He doesn't just know how to give good gifts, he actually gives them.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Let's praise our heavenly Father. Let's thank him for giving us so many good gifts throughout our lives. Praise him for never giving too soon or too late. Let's thank him for giving us bread when we asked for a stone, and fish when we asked for a snake. Praise him for not giving what would harm us. He is a good good father who gives good good gifts to his bad bad children. Praise him for his default, his instinct, which is to give good gifts to his children

Let's ask our heavenly Father. The aim of this passage is to encourage us to ask our Father for anything we need or want knowing that he is not looking for a reason to say "No!" but rather he's looking for a reason to say "Yes!" It's not a promise that God will give us whatever we want. It's a promise that if we bring our requests to him for whatever we want that he will give us what's good for us and will protect us from any gifts that would harm us. With that confidence we can ask, seek, and knock (7-8). We can come to his door and knock on it whenever we want, for whatever we want, with confidence that God will sort out the good from the bad and make sure that he will only give us what is good for us. Some people want verses 7-8 to be a blank check that we can fill in with whatever we want and God will always cash it. That not only ignores verses 9-11 but is also terrifying. I'd be so scared to ask God for anything if I didn't have the confidence that he would sift my requests into good and bad, helpful and harmful, and only give me the good and the helpful.

KNOCK, SEEK, ASK
GET GOOD, GOOD, GOOD



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

Receive the Gospel. Our Father gave us the best gift possible when he gave us His Son (John 3:16). He sacrificed his only begotten Son for the good of all his adopted sons and daughters.

Ask for the Holy Spirit. Luke's account reveals that Jesus defined the best gift as the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). He is the best gift because he brings God to us as our Savior, Sanctifier, Leader, Encourager. We can never have enough of the Holy Spirit and God can never give enough of the Holy Spirit. Ask for the Holy Spirit every day this week and see what happens.

What is prayer? Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies (SC 98)

Prayer. Giver of every good and perfect gift, help me to ask for anything knowing you will give only good and perfect gifts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of reactions did you get when you asked your earthly father for something?
2. How do you deal with the mixture of good and bad in your earthly father?
3. Can you think of a time your dad gave you something that turned out to be harmful?
4. How does the perfection of our heavenly Father affect your prayers?
5. When did God refuse a request that you eventually saw was for your good?
6. How will you know if God answers your prayer for the Holy Spirit this week?

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