

Teach Us to Pray, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: Asking: The Heart of a Good Father

Matthew 7:7–11; Luke 11:5–13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:5-13 teach the boldness of Christian asking, and they are among the passages most often misused in the religious world, so they call for both warmth and precision. The doctrine at stake is the fatherly goodness and wisdom of God as the foundation of petition. Jesus issues a sweeping invitation to ask, seek, and knock, and he grounds it not in a promise to grant whatever we name but in the character of the Father, who gives good gifts to his children and, in Luke, supremely the Holy Spirit. The teacher's task is to hold two truths together that we tend to split apart: God invites bold, persistent, confident asking, and God remains a wise Father who gives what is good rather than merely what we want.

Guard the central boundary clearly. "Ask, and it will be given to you" is not a blank check, and it is not a technique for getting whatever we desire if we believe hard enough. The very context defines what God gives: "good things" (Matthew), and "the Holy Spirit" (Luke). A good father does not give his child everything the child demands; he gives what is good, and sometimes that means a wiser gift than the one requested, or a loving no. To present these verses as a guarantee that faith-filled asking compels God to deliver health, wealth, or our chosen outcome is to teach the prosperity and word-of-faith error, which Scripture flatly contradicts (see James 4:3, where people ask and do not receive because they ask wrongly). Frame bold asking inside trust in the Father's goodness and wisdom.

The formational aim runs in two directions, because your class will hold both errors. Some are too timid; they have stopped asking, out of disappointment, low expectations, or a sense that they have no right to bother God. To them, this passage says: ask, the Father delights to give. Others lean toward presumption; they treat prayer as a means of securing what they want. To them, this passage says: the Father gives what is good, so trust him. The goal is to send students home both bolder and more trusting, asking freely as beloved children while resting in a Father wise enough to answer in the way that is truly best, and learning to want his best gift, himself, above all.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). What is Jesus actually inviting us to do, and what is the basis for this confident invitation, given how he goes on to describe the Father in the verses that follow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the sheer generosity of the invitation. Jesus stacks three verbs, ask, seek, knock, in the present tense, which carries the sense of ongoing action: keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. This is not a grudging permission to pray but an open-armed invitation to come to God freely and often. Help the class feel the warmth of it before any qualifications.

Then show where the confidence comes from. Jesus does not ask us to be confident in our own asking or in some technique; he immediately points to the Father (vv. 9-11). The whole basis of bold prayer is the character of the One we ask. We can ask freely because the Father is good, attentive, and generous.

Note the rising intensity of the images. Asking is verbal; seeking adds effort and searching; knocking adds persistence at a closed door. Together they picture a prayer life that is earnest and engaged, not passive. Jesus is describing people who really want what they ask for and who keep coming.

Hold the qualification for later but plant a seed now: the invitation is real and generous, and we will see that it is also wise. For this question, let the class simply hear the open door. Many of them need permission to ask at all before they need any cautions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The open, generous invitation to ask, seek, and knock
- The present-tense verbs implying ongoing, persistent asking
- Confidence grounded in the character of the Father, not in our technique
- Prayer as earnest and engaged, picturing people who really want what they ask
- The reality of the invitation before any necessary qualifications

Discussion Prompts

- What is the tone of Jesus' invitation to ask, seek, and knock?
- Where does Jesus locate the basis for our confidence in prayer?
- What do the rising images of asking, seeking, and knocking suggest about prayer?

Question 2

Student Question:

Some of us have quietly stopped asking God for things, whether out of disappointment, low expectations, or a sense that we shouldn't bother him. Have you stopped asking for something you once prayed about? What would it look like to take Jesus' invitation seriously and begin asking again, boldly, this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses the timid heart that has stopped asking. Many believers carry a quiet resignation: they prayed for something once, did not see the answer they wanted, and concluded that asking is pointless or presumptuous. Others simply expect little from God. Help the class name where they have gone silent with God.

Reconnect them to the invitation. Jesus did not say ask once and give up; he said keep asking. The Father is not annoyed by our requests; he invites them. For the disappointed, gently distinguish between unanswered-as-we-wished and unheard; God hears every prayer, even when he answers differently. That distinction can reopen a closed heart.

Call for a concrete renewal: pick one good thing they have stopped praying for and begin asking again this week, boldly and expectantly, while leaving the outcome with the Father. The aim is to break the silence and restore the childlike freedom to ask.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The timidity that quietly stops asking after disappointment or low expectations
- Jesus' call to keep asking rather than give up
- Distinguishing prayer answered differently from prayer unheard
- Renewing bold, expectant asking while leaving outcomes with the Father

Discussion Prompts

- Is there something good you have stopped praying for, and why?
- What is the difference between God not answering as you wished and not hearing you?
- What will you begin asking God for again this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11). How does this "how much more" reasoning work, and what does it teach us about the goodness of God compared even to the best human father?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Unpack Jesus' "how much more" argument, which is the engine of the whole passage. He starts with ordinary human fathers, who, though "evil" (that is, fallen and flawed), still know how to give their children good gifts. No decent father hands his hungry child a stone instead of bread or a snake instead of fish. The instinct to provide good things for our children is nearly universal, even among sinners.

Then watch Jesus reason upward. If flawed fathers give good gifts, how much more will the perfect heavenly Father? The argument moves from the lesser (sinful human fathers) to the greater (the holy, loving God). Whatever goodness we have seen in the best earthly father is a faint shadow of the Father's goodness. Help the class feel the force: God is not less generous than a good human parent but infinitely more.

Address those for whom "father" is a painful word. Jesus' argument actually helps them. He acknowledges that human fathers are "evil," flawed, and yet still often good to their children. God is not a bigger version of a disappointing father; he is the perfect Father by whom all others are measured and found wanting. The wounded can let the true Father correct the picture.

Apply it to asking. If we really believed God were this good, our prayers would change. We would ask more freely, expect more confidently, and rest more peacefully. The "how much more" is meant to dismantle our suspicion that God is reluctant or stingy and replace it with the confidence of a well-loved child.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The "how much more" argument from lesser to greater (Matthew 7:11)
- Even flawed human fathers giving good gifts to their children
- The perfect goodness of the heavenly Father exceeding the best earthly father
- God as the true Father by whom all earthly fathers are measured
- Confident, free asking flowing from belief in God's fatherly goodness

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus' reasoning from human fathers to the heavenly Father work?
- What does "how much more" tell you about God's generosity?
- How might believing God is this good change the way you ask?

Question 4

Student Question:

Our willingness to ask God is shaped by the picture of him we carry. If you tend to expect God to be reluctant, stingy, or disappointed in you, where might that picture have come from? How would actually believing he is a good Father change the way you come to him with requests?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question surfaces the distorted images of God that throttle our asking. Many of us carry, often unexamined, a picture of God as reluctant, stingy, easily annoyed, or perpetually disappointed in us. We then pray, or avoid praying, accordingly. Help students bring that picture into the light and trace where it came from: a harsh parent, a graceless church background, our own guilt projected onto God.

Confront the distortion with the text. The Father Jesus describes is generous, attentive, and good. Our reluctance to ask usually says more about our flawed picture of God than about God himself. Naming the false image is the first step to letting the true one replace it.

Invite a practice of re-imagining: this week, when they hesitate to ask God for something, have them pause and consciously preach the truth to themselves, that they are coming to a good Father who gives good gifts, and then ask. Repeated, this slowly rebuilds the picture and frees the prayer life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Distorted images of God (reluctant, stingy, disappointed) that hinder asking
- Tracing where our false pictures of God came from
- Letting the Father Jesus describes correct our distortions
- Preaching the truth of God's goodness to ourselves before we ask

Discussion Prompts

- What picture of God as Father do you carry into prayer, and where did it come from?
- How does your image of God shape whether and how you ask?
- How would believing God is truly good change your asking this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus promises that the Father gives "good things" (Matthew 7:11), and in Luke's version specifically "the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13). Why is it crucial that the Father gives what is good, rather than simply whatever we request, and what does it mean that the supreme gift he gives is his own Spirit rather than the things we often chase?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question opens the crucial qualifier that protects the whole passage: the Father gives "good things" (Matthew), and Luke specifies "the Holy Spirit." Jesus does not promise to give whatever we name; he promises to give what is good. This single word reframes the entire invitation and is the key to teaching the passage faithfully.

Explain why this matters. A good father does not give his child everything the child asks for, because children ask for things that would harm them. The child who asks for a snake, thinking it a fish, is lovingly refused. God's commitment is to our good, not to our every wish, and sometimes the most loving answer is a different gift or a no. This is not stinginess; it is wisdom and love.

Highlight Luke's stunning specification: the supreme good gift is "the Holy Spirit." Where Matthew says "good things," Luke names the best of them, God's own presence and power given to his children. This tells us what the Father is most eager to give: not primarily the stuff we chase, but himself. The deepest answer to prayer is more of God.

Apply it to our asking. This reorders our desires. We are invited to ask for good things, including daily needs, but to long most for the best things, God himself, his Spirit, his transforming work in us. It also frees us: when God gives something other than what we asked, we can trust that he is giving what is good, including, supremely, more of himself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Father gives "good things," not simply whatever we request (Matthew 7:11)
- A good father lovingly refusing what would harm his child
- The Holy Spirit as the supreme gift the Father delights to give (Luke 11:13)
- God himself, not merely his gifts, as the deepest answer to prayer
- Reordered desire: asking for good things while longing most for the best

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it crucial that God gives what is good rather than whatever we ask?
- What does it mean that the supreme gift is the Holy Spirit, not the things we chase?
- How should this reshape what we long for most in prayer?

Question 6

Student Question:

There is often a gap between what we want and what is actually good for us, a gap only a wise and loving Father can see. Where might you be asking God mainly for what you want, and how would trusting his wisdom to give what is good reshape that request, even if his answer is different from what you had in mind?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the gap between what we want and what is good into the student's actual requests. We are not always good judges of what will bless us; we ask for snakes thinking they are fish. The aim is not to make students doubt every desire but to cultivate trust in a Father who sees what they cannot.

Help them hold desire and trust together. It is good and right to ask for what we want; Jesus invites it. But mature prayer holds the request open-handed, adding in effect, "Father, this is what I want, but you know what is good; give me that." This is not resignation; it is the confidence that the Father's wisdom is kinder than our own.

Prescribe a concrete reframing: take one current request and pray it boldly, then deliberately entrust the outcome to the Father's wisdom, asking him to give what is truly good even if it differs from the request. Encourage students to watch for how this loosens anxiety and deepens trust.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between what we want and what is actually good for us
- Holding desire and trust together in prayer
- Asking boldly while leaving the outcome to the Father's wisdom
- Trust in God's wisdom as kinder than our own preferences

Discussion Prompts

- Where might you be asking mainly for what you want rather than what is good?
- What does it look like to ask boldly and still trust God's wisdom?
- How could you reframe one request this week to leave the outcome with God?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Luke, Jesus tells of a friend who keeps knocking at midnight until his neighbor gives him what he needs (Luke 11:5-8), and then says, "Ask... seek... knock." What does this picture of bold, persistent asking teach us, and how does Jesus make clear that such persistence is not because God is reluctant, but because he is a willing Father who invites us to keep coming?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take up the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8), which Jesus places right before "ask, seek, knock." A man's neighbor keeps knocking at an inconvenient hour until he gets the bread he needs. The point is persistence, but we must read the parable the way Jesus intends, which is by contrast, not comparison.

Clarify the contrast. The sleepy, reluctant neighbor is not a picture of God; he is the opposite. The reasoning is: if even a grudging neighbor will finally respond to persistent asking, how much more will a willing, loving Father respond to his children? Persistence in prayer is not about wearing down a reluctant God, as though we must nag him into caring. It is the natural posture of people who keep bringing their needs to a Father they trust.

Distinguish godly persistence from pagan repetition. Jesus elsewhere warns against "heaping up empty phrases" as if many words compel God (Matthew 6:7). Persistent prayer is not a technique to force God's hand; it is sustained, trusting asking that keeps coming back to the Father. The difference is the heart: nagging tries to manipulate; persistence trusts and keeps asking.

Apply it. Jesus is freeing us to keep praying without fear that we are bothering God or that repeated asking shows weak faith. We may bring the same request again and again, like a child returning to a parent, confident that the Father is not annoyed but attentive. Persistence is an expression of trust, not of doubt.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The friend at midnight as a contrast to God, not a comparison (Luke 11:5-8)
- Persistence not as wearing down a reluctant God but as the posture of trusting children
- The “how much more” logic: a willing Father far surpasses a grudging neighbor
- Godly persistence distinguished from pagan, manipulative repetition (Matthew 6:7)
- Persistent prayer as an expression of trust rather than doubt

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the reluctant neighbor a contrast to God rather than a picture of him?
- How is godly persistence different from trying to nag God into acting?
- How does this free you to keep bringing the same request to God?

Question 8

Student Question:

It is easy to ask once, hear nothing, and give up. Is there something good you have stopped praying for too soon? What would it look like to keep asking, seeking, and knocking with the bold persistence Jesus commends, while still trusting the Father with the outcome?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to recover a request they abandoned too soon. Many of us pray once or twice, hear nothing immediately, and quietly conclude the matter is closed. Jesus’ “keep asking” challenges that habit. Help the class identify a good and worthy thing they stopped praying for prematurely.

Balance persistence with trust, so this does not curdle into anxious striving. We keep asking not to twist God’s arm but because we trust him and the matter still weighs on our hearts. We persist and we rest at the same time, continuing to ask while leaving the timing and the outcome with the Father.

Prescribe a step: choose one such request and commit to praying for it regularly over the coming weeks, with both persistence and surrender. Encourage students to notice that persistent prayer often changes the one praying, deepening trust and clarifying what they truly long for, even as they wait on God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Recovering good requests we abandoned too soon
- Persistence balanced with trust, not anxious striving
- Continuing to ask while surrendering timing and outcome to God
- Persistent prayer shaping and clarifying the one who prays

Discussion Prompts

- What good thing have you stopped praying for too quickly?
- How can you persist in prayer without slipping into anxious striving?
- What request will you commit to bringing to God regularly this season?

Question 9

Student Question:

“Ask, and it will be given to you” can be twisted into a blank check, as though God has promised to grant whatever we want if we ask with enough faith or the right words. Why is this a serious misreading, and how do the goodness and wisdom of the Father, who gives good gifts and supremely the Holy Spirit, frame bold asking within trust rather than turning prayer into a technique for getting whatever we desire? How does this guard us against prosperity and “name it and claim it” teaching?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and it must be taught with both clarity and pastoral care, because the misuse of “ask, and it will be given” has wounded many. The error treats this promise as a blank check: if you ask with enough faith, or in just the right way, God is obligated to give you whatever you named. On that view, an unanswered prayer means you did not believe hard enough. This is false, and it is cruel.

Refute it from the text itself. Jesus defines what the Father gives: “good things” (Matthew 7:11) and “the Holy Spirit” (Luke 11:13). He does not promise to give whatever we want; he promises that a good Father gives what is good. Scripture elsewhere is explicit that God sometimes does not grant our requests, and even tells us why: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:3). And the confidence of 1 John 5:14 is that God hears us “if we ask anything according to his will,” not according to our wishes. The promise of answered prayer always runs through the goodness and will of the Father.

Name the prosperity and word-of-faith error directly and kindly. Prayer is not a technique for compelling God to deliver health, wealth, success, or comfort. Faith is not a force that guarantees outcomes, and a different answer than we wanted is not proof of insufficient faith. Such teaching turns the good Father into a vending machine and crushes sincere believers when the promised results do not come. Jesus’ actual teaching is far better: we ask boldly because the

Father is good, and we trust restfully because the Father is wise. Bold asking and humble trust are not in tension; they are the two halves of childlike prayer.

Then land on the comfort. A Father who gives only what we demand would be dangerous, because we often demand what would harm us. A Father who gives what is good, and supremely himself, can be trusted with every request. So we are freed to ask for anything and everything, holding it all open-handed, confident that he will answer in the way that is truly best, whether yes, no, or wait. That is not a watering down of the promise; it is the promise rightly understood, and it is the only version of it that will hold up in the real world of unanswered and differently-answered prayers. The next lesson will take up persistence and God's will more fully; here, settle the class firmly on the goodness and wisdom of the Father.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A clear rejection of “ask and receive” as a blank check or a faith technique
- Jesus defining the gift as “good things” and “the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13)
- Scripture's witness that God may decline requests asked wrongly (James 4:3)
- Answered prayer running through the Father's goodness and will (1 John 5:14)
- A clear rejection of prosperity and word-of-faith teaching: faith is not a force that compels outcomes
- Bold asking and humble trust as the two halves of childlike prayer
- The freedom and comfort of trusting a Father who gives what is truly good

Discussion Prompts

- Why is reading “ask and it will be given” as a blank check a serious misreading?
- How do “good things” and “the Holy Spirit” reframe what God has promised to give?
- How can we ask boldly and trust humbly at the same time, without slipping into prosperity teaching?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:5-13, with their bold invitation to ask, their picture of a good Father, and their promise of good gifts and the Spirit himself. Name one specific thing you will begin asking God for boldly, and one way Jesus is teaching you to ask with confidence in the Father's goodness while trusting his wisdom with the answer.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers both passages into a single, balanced resolve. Trace the movement once more: a bold invitation to ask, seek, and knock; a good Father who gives good gifts, far surpassing the best earthly father; and the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit himself. The passage makes us both freer to ask and quieter to trust.

Press for the double application that matches the lesson's two targets. Ask each student to name one specific thing they will begin asking God for boldly (countering timidity), and one way they are learning to trust the Father's wisdom with the answer (countering presumption). The healthy goal is a prayer life that is at once more daring and more restful.

Close by praying together, modeling both halves: bring real, bold requests to the Father, and entrust each one to his good wisdom, asking above all for more of himself. Let the class leave having asked boldly and surrendered trustingly in the same breath.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis: bold asking grounded in the Father's goodness and wisdom
- Countering both timidity (ask more boldly) and presumption (trust more fully)
- Longing most for the Father himself and his Spirit
- Spiritual formation: a prayer life both more daring and more restful

Discussion Prompts

- What specific thing will you begin asking God for boldly this week?
- How are you learning to trust the Father's wisdom with the answer?
- How can the class encourage one another to ask boldly and trust deeply?