

Teach Us to Pray

Lesson 7: Asking: The Heart of a Good Father -- Matthew 7:7–11; Luke 11:5–13

A child does not agonize over how to ask for dinner. She does not rehearse the right words, or wonder whether she has been good enough that day to deserve a meal, or worry that her father will be annoyed by the request. She simply asks, because she knows him. She has lived under his roof long enough to know that he feeds her, that he is glad to, that asking is just what you do with a good father. Jesus says the door to prayer swings on a hinge exactly that simple, and exactly that profound: “Ask, and it will be given to you.”

Many of us have made prayer far more complicated than that, and far more anxious. We hesitate to ask, unsure whether we have the right to. Or we have asked, been disappointed, and quietly stopped. Or we swing the other way and treat asking like a vending machine, convinced that if we just press the right buttons with enough faith, out comes whatever we ordered. Jesus cuts through both the timidity and the presumption with one piercing image: God is a Father, and a good one, better than the best father any of us has ever known.

Listen to how he argues it. “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.” Even flawed human fathers do not hand their hungry children a stone or a snake. They give bread, fish, what is good. How much more, Jesus says, your perfect Father. And in Luke’s account he names the best gift of all: the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. The point of asking is not to bend God’s arm. It is to receive, from a Father who delights to give good things, what is truly good.

That is where this lesson begins, with a Father whose goodness invites us to ask boldly and whose wisdom we can trust completely. Jesus is not handing us a blank check. He is handing us himself, and inviting us to come like children to a Father who knows what we need before we ask and loves us too much to give us a stone. Read these verses slowly, and let them make you bold to ask and content to trust.

Group Discussion: People relate to asking God for things in very different ways: some hesitate to ask at all, some have given up after disappointment, and some treat prayer almost like a vending machine. Where do you see these tendencies around you, and why do you think Jesus grounds the whole invitation to ask in the picture of God as a good Father?

Personal Reflection: Think about your own asking. Are you more tempted to hold back from asking God for things, or to treat asking as a way to get exactly what you want? What does your pattern of asking, or not asking, reveal about how you really picture God as a Father?

Read Matthew 7:7–11; Luke 11:5–13

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. “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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: James 1:5-8, asking God for wisdom in faith, without doubting; James 4:2-3, not having because we do not ask, and asking wrongly to spend on our passions; 1 John 5:14-15, the confidence that he hears us when we ask according to his will; Matthew 6:31-33, seeking first the kingdom while trusting the Father to supply our needs; Luke 11:1-4, the model prayer that immediately precedes Jesus' teaching on bold asking.