

A GOOD FATHER'S GOOD GIFTS Matthew 7:7-12

INTRODUCTION:

OK. Today is Fathers' Day. One might be excused for thinking of Fathers' Day as the *Other Parents' Day*, coming along as it does five weeks after Mother's Day as if to say, "Aren't you forgetting someone?"

A few years ago, 25 newspapers, including **USA Today** took part in a comparison titled "How Does Dad Stack Up?" Here's a comparison of how moms and dads fare on their respective days of honor:

- What we'll spend: On Mom = \$11.2 billion; on Dad = \$8.2 billion
- That works out to, on average, \$104.63 per purchaser spent on Moms (often, more than one Mom) compared with \$85.66 per purchaser spent on Dads
- Annually, we send 150 million cards to Moms and 95 million to Dads
- Adults who eat out on Mothers' Day: 38%; on Fathers' Day = 23%
- Rank in terms of flowers sent: Mothers' Day: 3rd; Fathers' Day = 10th
- Calls on Mothers' Day = 160 million; on Fathers' Day = 140 million
- But, according to Dave Johnson, a spokesman for AT&T's corporate headquarters in New Jersey, "Fathers' Day is our biggest day for collect calls, not just the biggest holiday but the biggest day of the year."

Fathers can be the neglected parents. When an NFL running back scores a touchdown and the camera zooms in on him huffing and puffing on the sidelines, usually he says, "Hi, Mom"...not "Hi, Dad."

Many a sailor on shore leave has had "MOTHER" tattooed across his chest. You don't see a lot of tattoos that say "DAD".

Fathers can be the forgotten figures in the family. And we may have brought it on ourselves by being so busy with our cars, our careers and our cares that we neglect our calling to be the heads of our households.

Not only are Dads often overlooked, sometimes it is worse. Some people have grown up with fathers who were not positive role models and warm, supportive influences in their lives. For folk like that, telling them that God is their Father Who is in heaven, does not conjure up images that bring feelings of warmth, security or love. People who suffered neglect or abuse at the hands of their earthly father, often have difficulty feeling drawn toward the concept of a heavenly Father. If this is you, I have incredibly good news for you today: God is the Father you always wished you had.

And if you were blessed with a kind and loving earthly father, I have good news for you, too: your Father in heaven is all that and more.

Either way, you have a heavenly Father who wants to hear from you. And you can call Him collect!

I. THE APPROACH (7:7)

Matthew 7:7 reads, “*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*”

And when I read that text, one of the first questions I ask is, “What is it for which I have been given permission to ask?” Is Jesus saying I can ask for ANYTHING? The proponents of the Prosperity Gospel, the preachers of Name-it-and-claim-it Theology say so. They say you can ask for any earthly thing and God is obligated to give it to you.

In his best-selling book, *Your Best Life Now*, Joel Osteen tells the story about going shopping with his family. They went to a busy mall and could not find a parking space anywhere in the mall parking lot. So Osteen says he stopped the car and, in the presence of his family, prayed that God would provide them with a parking space. No sooner had he finished his prayer than someone pulled out of the best parking space in the lot. Osteen pulled into it and the family thanked God for giving them a parking spot and went into the mall to shop.

One catch phrase of this “word of Faith” movement is, “What I confess, I possess.” You may recognize the names of Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer and Bill Winston who are also proponents of this teaching. They would tell you that when Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you,” he meant you can ask for anything and God is obligated to obey you.

People who teach this kind of doctrine don’t preach much on James 4:3. In that text, James wrote, “*When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*” James was warning us not to believe in a vending-machine god: put in a token of false teaching, pull the lever of greed that you call prayer and out pops a parking place, a new house, a winning lottery ticket or a miracle cure.

When Jesus told us that if we ask it will be given to us, he was not telling us that God was subordinating Himself to us, abdicating His throne and leaving us in charge. God is not a pandering Father who is obligated to indulge His spoiled children every time they say “Gimme, gimme, gimme.”

No, we must put this text in its context. In this same sermon, Jesus taught us how to pray and he said we are to pray that God's Kingdom would come and that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus *never* told us to pray that our will would be done...not in regard to parking spaces, not in regard to dwelling places and not in regard to hands full of aces.

Going all the way back to the beginning of this Sermon, Jesus told us that his disciples would be people who hunger and thirst for righteousness, not people who hunger and thirst for the world's goodies.

At various times and in various places during Jesus' ministry, the crowds flocked to him because they thought they could use him to get their wants satisfied. And then they left him when they learned that his message was about a Kingdom where there is power and glory but it all belongs to God and none of it would belong to them. People still flock to churches that tell you how to use God to get your way. And they still leave if they find out that the Kingdom is about God using us.

We are to come to God as loving, dependent children, asking our heavenly Father to grant us what we need so we can *receive* His Kingdom and so we can *advance* His Kingdom.

II. THE ASSURANCE (7:8)

The assurance of Jesus is that if we come to God as humble, loving and dependent children, God will respond as a loving and gracious Father.

⁸ *For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

If we ask for God's Kingdom to come, we will receive it...by grace. Not because we demand it or deserve it but because God desires for His Kingdom to come to those who will receive it.

If we seek God's Kingdom values and God's Kingdom attitudes, we will find them because God wants to reveal them to us.

If we knock on the door of the palace, God will open it to us, not because we are worthy of entry but because He is a loving Father who wants to welcome us home.

Now I should tell you that the Greek tense of all of these verbs is present indicative active. That means we are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking and knock and keep on knocking. Why are we to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking and knock and keep on knocking?

Is God like a poor parent who can be worn down until He gives in to a whining child who asks and keeps on asking? Is He playing tricks on us by hiding His gifts from us so we must seek and keep on seeking? Is it because God is old and He's losing His hearing so we have to knock and keep on knocking?

No, the reason Jesus told us to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking is because he is teaching us about a lifestyle of humility and dependence on our heavenly Father.

The blessed assurance is that if you want God's Kingdom to come to you, it will. And you don't have to earn your place in His Kingdom. Just ask, seek and knock.

III. THE ANSWER (7:9-12)

⁹ "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The truth of this text is that when we pray, God does not play tricks on us. Have you ever heard someone warn you to be careful of what you pray because God just might give you what you ask for?

According to Jesus, like a loving Father, God only ever gives good gifts to His children.

Back in about 1973, Sandy and I were living in England and she was homesick. So I bought her a puppy...a West Highland White Terrier she named "Kirby". Kirby was a cute little dog with a boatload of personality. I would buy Kirby doggy vitamins that were chocolate-flavored pieces that were about the size, shape and color of a penny. Kirby loved those chocolate vitamins and I'd give them to him as treats. He got so that if I tossed them to him, he'd grab them out of the air and swallow them with one snap of his jaws. One day, I got to thinking about how much those buttons looked like pennies and the devil got the best of me. I tossed Kirby a couple of chocolate buttons and then tossed him a penny. He snapped that penny out of the air, spit it out on the floor and never again caught another vitamin that I pitched to him. EVER!

Kirby had lost confidence in me because I had played a trick on him. Jesus wants us to know that God doesn't play tricks on His children.

- ❖ In the world where Jesus lived, the ground was littered with stones that looked like loaves of bread. Jesus said that no Dad would ever give his son a stone when what he asked for was bread.
- ❖ And if a Father's son asked him for a fish, no good Dad would ever give him a snake.

Jesus' point is that if we know how to give good gifts to our children, don't you know that God knows how to give good gifts to those who ask Him?

On the one hand, that means that He will not fail to give us good gifts if we ask for them. And on the other hand, that means that He will not give us something that will harm us even if we ask for it.

If it is for God's Kingdom that we pray, we will receive it; we will find it and it will be opened to us. And God's Kingdom is not a trick that He plays on His gullible kids. God's Kingdom is a good gift...a very good gift...the best gift we will ever receive. And Jesus was dying to give it to us.

CONCLUSION:

It is customary to give gifts to our Dads on Fathers' Day. And historically, the most traditional gift had been the necktie. I suspect that the number of neckties given for Fathers' Day has declined over the years, though.

But this year, your heavenly Father wants to give you a gift. He wants to give you His Kingdom to enjoy now and for eternity. Do you want it? Will you receive it?

INVITATION: #713 – *“Seek Ye First”*