

Are We Supposed to Ask God for Anything We Want?

Luke 11:1-26

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And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 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 11:9-13, ESV

Are there rules for what we should ask God for or not? Does God have a list of what we should and should not ask Him to give us? Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you." So, can we ask for anything? Well, we can; obviously, nothing is stopping us. However, should we? Is it wise?

We need to be careful and clear as we consider this question. God wants us to be honest, to pour out our hearts before Him. He does not want us to be hypocrites, and He knows our hearts better than we do anyway. However, that doesn't mean that every desire of our hearts and every request of our lips is pleasing to Him. When God says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will grant you the desire of your heart" in Psalm 37:4, the first half of the verse changes and shapes and conditions the second half.

Here in Luke 11, Jesus teaches His disciples the pattern for prayer before he encourages them to be bold and persistent and tells them "everyone who asks receives." In other words, Jesus sets the kingdom priorities for prayer before he urges His disciples to be bold and persistent in prayer. And then, at the end of His teaching on prayer here, He tells His disciples that the Father wants to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

From "Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come" to "the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him," Jesus' teaching on prayer is spiritual and focused on the kingdom, the honor and the power of God. Prayer never has been and never will be a formula for how to get rich, famous and powerful and have all of your wildest dreams come true!

To make this even clearer, Jesus gives the illustration of how earthly fathers respond to their children's good requests: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" But the reverse is just as true and easy to see, right? What good father would give his son a serpent just because he asks for it. [Well, sadly, lots of parents give their kids smartphones with unfiltered access to the worst imaginable vile content in the world, so maybe . . . ?]

Still, if God is a wise and loving Heavenly Father, He will not give us the serpents and scorpions we so often do ask for. He will say no. Sometimes, when we persist in asking, He does give into our requests because He can see that the only way for us to learn the danger of our request is to actually handle the scorpion for ourselves. Still, He does not delight in hearing or answering such requests, even when His Fatherly wisdom condescends to them.

I have found over years of walking with the Lord that I rarely ask for the things I truly need in the best way and with the best intentions. But my Father is wise and loving, patient and kind. He will deny harmful requests and give me what I need instead. He will also sometimes give me a small dose of what I think I want, so I can see that it's not what I need after all. And through it all, I have found that the simple pattern of praying the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms and other prayers from Scripture really is the best, wisest and safest path!