



Today's study takes us to a familiar passage in the Sermon on the Mount related to who God is and how we are to approach Him with our requests. Whenever we talk about God being a Father, that can stir up uncomfortable experiences for many people. Some of us were raised in a healthy home and had a good relationship with our fathers. For others, that's not the story. For some, their dad was in the home, but it wasn't a healthy home. For others, their dad was totally out of the picture. So, whenever we talk about God as Father, it's a bit of a mixed bag for many. Here's what we want for everyone today: To understand that God is a perfect Father. For those of us with good dads, God is even better. For those who have an unhealthy picture of what a father is, God is the perfect Father. He can be to you what your earthly father should have been.

Key Passage: Matthew 7:7-11

Discussion Questions:

1. How can experiences with our earthly father influence our perception of God as Father? How can you reconcile any negative experiences to embrace God's perfect fatherhood?
2. How does understanding God as a perfect, approachable Father change your perspective on prayer and your relationship with Him?

Think about who we are approaching here – One who is infinitely Holy, Creator of the universe, the most powerful Person in the universe. And yet, there's no reluctance required in approaching the Father! In fact, the writer of Hebrews describes how we approach God like this: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). We can walk confidently towards the throne of God, but because of Jesus. We don't approach prayer in fear but in confidence, because we have been forgiven, covered by the blood of Jesus, and brought into the family of God. So, we approach the throne as sons and daughters who have an approachable Father, and when we do, we find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

3. What factors contribute to our hesitation in approaching God with our needs or desires? How can we overcome these hesitations together?
4. How can the story of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) inspire you to continue praying for something you've given up on?

Jesus' call in Matthew 7 to "ask, seek, knock" is in the present tense (keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking), indicating persistent prayer over a long period of time. These words from Jesus show us that God welcomes our prayers, and we can come to the Father with persistence. Persistent

prayer (asking, seeking, knocking) indicates faith. Otherwise, we give up and cease asking, seeking, and knocking. Have you given up asking God for anything? Things you know that align your heart with God's.

5. Consider the analogy Jesus uses in Matthew 7:9-11 about a father giving good gifts to his children. How does this help you trust God's goodness and responses to your prayers?

If you're a parent, and your child asks you for a piece of bread, would you give him a stone? Of course not. If your child asks for a fish, would you give him a snake? Of course not. Jesus uses these two ridiculous illustrations to show us the heart of God as our Father.

6. Have you ever felt that your prayers were unanswered or not answered in the way you expected? How can the idea that God knows what is best for us help you trust His timing and decisions?

Do you believe that God withholds things that are not good for you? How often do we desperately want things, thinking we need them or that they will fulfill us, and God withholds them because He knows they're not good for us. He is trustworthy, knowing what we need and what we do not. If God has not answered your prayer, it's one of two options: (1) Either it's not in the will of God, or (2) the timing isn't right. If something has been withheld from you, you can trust those two things – either it's not right, or the timing isn't right.

7. Think about a specific area in your life where you need to start asking, seeking, and knocking again. What steps can you take to renew your commitment to persistent prayer in this area?
8. What does it mean to truly trust that God is trustworthy? How can you deepen your trust in God, especially when you feel disappointed or frustrated with unanswered prayers?

Trusting God can be more complicated if you don't have a trustworthy father. If your dad walked out on you or made terrible choices for your family, it can be hard to picture your Heavenly Father as trustworthy. To trust God means that you begin at the place of trusting that HE IS TRUSTWORTHY. It is a foundational belief that God knows what is best in my life – He is a Father with my best interest at heart.