

## Our generous Dad in heaven responds to our requests

October 26, 2008 - Matthew 6:9-13

Who is the most famous or powerful person you have met?

What did you feel like in their presence? I'm sure many of you have had encounters with famous and interesting people. In fact, I surveyed a few people in the congregation this week for their experiences.

With permission, I want to share a few with you.

Rob Huizinga met Dr. Willem Kolff, the man who invented dialysis which has saved millions of lives. When asked the particulars of their encounter Rob writes, *Willem Kolff, was delivering a keynote address at an international science meeting. . Afterwards, I waited in the wings to talk to him. He waited patiently, answering the multitudes of questions that came after the lecture. Finally I had a chance to talk to him, and realized that while he was proud of his accomplishments he was not a proud man. He was very humble considering he was directly responsible for saving the lives of millions.* Rob shares that in this doctor's presence; he didn't really feel awe because of the man's humility. He was a humble everyday man.

Dieter Lemke shares about his request to some officials. He went to see the powerful Bansa Tribal Chief, as well as the Provincial

Delegates for Health and Education, Dieter asked permission to hold public meetings and visit all schools throughout the Northwest Province in Cameroon with his AIDS prevention message.

Dieter writes, "I was well prepared and thoroughly convinced of the need for this unusual action. I felt passionately responsible for the many people dying under my care. I was burdened, desperate, serious and well informed about the epidemic. I felt humbled, honored, hopeful and confident in these important people's presence. They heard me out and all granted my request, though not all were as convinced by my concerns, as I was. Nevertheless, their permission gave me great freedom and even joy over the rightness of my cause."

Then from the most unexpected source, we discover a person who has met some real heavyweights. Dolci Arlinghaus had dinner with **Alex Trebek** of Jeopardy fame. She writes, "He is a very nice and pleasant man. It was exciting to get to meet him and talk with him. I was normal - other people who came to say hello were like, "HEY DOUBLE JEOPARDY!!!!" Al and I had a giggle about it later.

Dolci also met **Matthew Perry** (Chandler on "Friends") - We discussed a movie roll, I wouldn't be good for. He wasn't THAT

famous at the time, but it was a neat opportunity. It was very cool having done that and then seeing him hit the height of his fame and saying, "hey, I met him."

Dolci also skated with **Kurt Browning** and **Kristi Yamaguchi** on a daily basis for a number of years. It was a normal thing so I didn't "feel much" in their presence, but I used to watch to see what a "Champion" was like on and off the ice.

Then there is Andrea Morris, wife of our beloved Youth Pastor. She responded to my request by writing "The most famous person I ever met.....I'll never forget the day I met Tom Anderst. I felt nervous, privileged and humbled in his presence." Do you see some of what I have to put up with?

It's one thing to be in the presence of powerful or famous people. It's another to ask them for something as Dieter did. Imagine that you are in God's throne room. The Mighty God takes His glorious throne. Thousands upon thousands of heavenly servants stand before Him. You want to ask Him for help to find your keys. Will you ask?

Some of us might hesitate because we've been taught that asking God for something is really a sign of spiritual immaturity. Some say asking is a lower form of prayer than the prayer of praise we talked about last week. But asking of God remains a primary need throughout our entire lives. Remember in simple prayer, we learned we must embrace our role as dependents on God? So asking prayer is not immature.

Some might hesitate because we think "I shouldn't bother God with petty details." But in one sense, nothing is more important to God than the anxiety we feel over an upcoming medical appointment or the exasperation we feel over our kids or the desperation we might feel over our aging parents. Parents and Grandparents you know how much you crave petty details of your children's day at school. God longs to hear from us the smallest matters of our lives.

Or we might hesitate to ask in prayer because God already knows what we need. So why bother asking? But asking prayer involves much more than making a request. In asking, we express our trust in God. It shows we are convinced of His power, love, goodness

and wisdom. And asking prayer serves as a means to express our love and fellowship with God.

So today we're going to continue making requests of the most powerful person in the universe, mighty God of the Bible. In fact the central truth I want to put forward today is your message title: "Our generous Dad in heaven responds to our requests." I want to explain what I mean by that by working through a couple of Scriptures that point to this. All this comes within our series on prayer. We spent five messages on internal issues of prayer. We looked in to regular challenges in our daily walk. Last week we started to look up to the one we pray to. We discovered the prayer of praise to the God worthy of praise. This week, we're looking up to the One we ask of. I want you to see 3 realities about God through this message which I hope He will use to encourage a balanced and healthy approach to asking or petitionary prayer. Our journey begins in Matthew 6, starting at verse 9. Some of you might have heard this one before.

Matthew 6:9-13 (Jesus is talking)

<sup>9</sup>"This, then, is how you should pray:

" 'Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
<sup>10</sup>your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup>Give us today our daily bread.

<sup>12</sup>Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'

This is what's now known as the Lord's Prayer. It concerns the whole world, from the coming of the kingdom to daily bread. Large and small; spiritual and material, inward and outward – nothing is beyond this prayer. Certainly praise of God is at the beginning and end. But it makes 7 requests with 4 very personal petitions. *Give us daily bread; forgive us our debts; lead us not into temptation; deliver us from the evil one.* But our focus today is on the *one* we ask from. The first line of this prayer provides us with two realities about God.

### **Reality #1 – God is our Dad – Matthew 6:9**

The prayer begins with "Our Father." So why say God is our dad? Well in English today, you use the word father when you talk about your male parent or if you more formally address your male parent. "My father was/is a doctor or electrician." Or your father may have preferred to be called "father." More informally, we may have called our fathers dad, daddy, papa or grumpy. Those are familiar and affectionate names. Since "Father" seems more formal

today in many circles. We might conclude that Jesus is saying we must address God formally.

But this does not seem to be Jesus' intention. Behind the simple Greek word for father "pater" is the Aramaic word "abba." Aramaic was the common language of the day that Jesus spoke to the disciples. "Abba" is the Aramaic term of special affection and intimacy used by children addressing their earthly fathers. So Jesus instructs the disciples to begin prayer by addressing God as their Dad who really cares about them like a loving earthly father would care for his little ones.

This was a change. In the Old Testament, the only time God was referred to as Father was in reference to the entire nation of Israel. Pastor and author David Jeremiah points out:

*The men and women who worshiped God in Old Testament days had a great sense of fear and reverence for Him. But the downside of their experience was a lack of personal intimacy with God. They had to approach Him through the Tabernacle, the Temple, and animal sacrifice. In the entire Old Testament, the word "father" is used to describe God only fourteen times, and in every instance it*

*refers to God as the father of the Israelite nation. In Israel, some grasped that there could be intimacy with God – like Moses, David and Isaiah. But many view God only as Father of the nation.*

In the New Testament, things change. In this very first book, we are reminded that God the Father is not only national; it is individual and personal. Jesus uses the term "Father" seventeen times in the Sermon on the Mount alone.

Why was this closeness with God emphasized?

God was on the move to restore closeness between Him and His people. Man's sin caused a great breach in relationship with God. Our violation of God's moral law removed us to an unreachable distance from God. But God was bridging that gap through His Son Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, His blood would pay the price for our sins; so we could enter again into intimate close relationship with God as our Father that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the garden. Romans 8:15-16 talks about this reality.

<sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

<sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

Galatians 4:6-7 speaks of the same thing.

<sup>6</sup>Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

David Jeremiah writes "One of our greatest needs is to be loved by our father. This is true for all of us. Knowing that our father loves us gives us a stability and strength that simply changes everything."<sup>1</sup>

And that is especially true when the father we're talking about is our Heavenly Father.

Jesus teaches us to start praying by coming to Our Dad. Maybe you had an unloving earthly father. Don't let that stop you from coming to your Heavenly Papa who loves you beyond measure. We are to come to God as His children. But what about becoming too casual with God? What about forgetting that He is God and we are not. Jesus looks after that concern with the next half of phrase.

**Reality #2 – God is our Dad in Heaven** – Matthew 6:9. Our Father in Heaven. Dad in heaven balances intimacy with God and awesomeness of God. We pray to the infinite, Almighty God. This addition "in heaven" protects us from coming too casually.

We're not talking to our buddy. We are communicating with the all powerful ruler of the universe; way more powerful than the most

influential or powerful person you have ever met. He's way more powerful than the President of some multinational corporation or some country.

We're coming to ask of the God Ezekiel described. Ezekiel saw One who looked from his waist up like "glowing metal, as if full of fire; and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him." (Ezekiel 1:27-28). We spent much time on the awesomeness of God and His works in last week's message. Remember He is creator and redeemer of His people. He is creator and redeemer of the Earth and the whole universe. He is ruler over all kings, nations and history. Since we just looked at that, I won't spend as much time on this one today.

The One we pray to is Our Dad in Heaven. But what kind of reception might we expect to our asking. Well **Reality #3 God is our generous Dad in Heaven** (Matthew 7:11)

Matthew 7:7-11 NIV (Jesus says)

*Ask, Seek, Knock*

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah, Prayer the Great Adventure.

<sup>7</sup>"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>9</sup>"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>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!

Now prior to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, Jesus teaches that our prayers should be brief, simple, done in private, expressed in faith. But incase we think the Father asks us to be brief because he does not want to waste time with us, or that prayer should be "not much" because the Father wants not much of us, Jesus gives this additional teaching on prayer.

In verses 7 and 8, six different times in six different ways, Jesus almost begs us to pray. He promises that simple asking receives, seeking finds and knocking opens. One Bible commentator writes, "Here disciples are encouraged to pour out their hearts before the Father. Open ended promises are like huge gift baskets beckoning us to come and take." Ask – put forth your request. Seek – pursue an answer. Knock – make your presence known that you have come to ask.

To emphasize how much He means this, Jesus provides two shocking illustrations in verses 9 and 10. "Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread would give him a stone?" Any loving earthly father would provide food for His children. No father would try to trick his kids by placing a stone on their plates instead of bread.

Nor would any loving earthly father provide his child with a snake when he asks for a fish. It seems here the request is again for food. Jesus says "no loving father would give something that might harm or scare their child. Earthly fathers respond to their children's basic requests. Then he makes a really shocking statement in verse 11.

"You then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children", what's this evil reference? Well we human fathers have a sinful nature. We all sin. Yet we are likely to respond to our children's requests with good gifts. So if sinful earthly fathers give good gifts to their children, how might a sinless heavenly Father respond to requests from His children? Jesus' answer: How much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Notice the exclamation point at the end. Jesus is excited. He

wants to really emphasize this. The disciple can come to the Father in full confidence of God's willingness to respond.

One person who taught me a lot about asking in prayer was lady from our church in Ottawa. Her name was Joan. She's gone to be with the Lord now. She was a tough old Brit who gave birth during an air raid in London. She would tell the story of a bullet hitting the floor near where she was delivering. But her health was failing along with her ability to walk. She still lived alone for much of our years there. She would tell us of the constant dialogue with the Lord. "Lord, I need to get up these stairs. I need to get to the phone. I need to get to church. She had trouble breathing and I would ask the Lord for help in taking breaths." She constantly testified about the God who looked after her. God does respond to our asking.

But for some of you, red flags go up when you read Jesus' words here. You may have heard people use these verses to name and claim anything in the world for yourself – yacht, horse, pool etc. You may have used these verses yourself and asked God of things. Yet it didn't come to be. Or we might think this is pretty naïve. God doesn't answer little prayers. It's just a coincidence. What are we to make of

these realities? Why is Jesus so dangerously absolute with this promise?

Well first, we must remember God does sometimes say no. We looked at that a few weeks ago with Moses. When that happens, we must trust God's character and look for what He says yes to.

We must also guard against using these verses to bash people for lack of faith. The mysteries of why God says yes or no to requests is often beyond us. So we must not make simplistic conclusions about situations and pronounce that "if only you had more faith, God would answer." That perspective paints God as a reluctant giver who will only respond when people exercise a certain level of faith.

That's not who Jesus describes here. He describes a Father who can't wait to pour out good gifts on His children. It could be that Jesus is more concerned about the disciple's lack of prayer rather than a potential misuse of prayer. It could be that He is convinced of the disciple's appalling lack of faith which would often manifest itself in an appalling lack of prayer. Our lack of prayer and lack of asking might reflect a lack of faith in the Lord. One commentator writes, "We carry around within us great bundles of wishes that never become

askings. We wish our relationships at work were better – have we prayed about them? We wish our troubles and worries would go away; have we prayed about them?”

God has to remind me of this all the time especially when I’m feeling good and things are going well. I easily slip into that false belief that I am in control. I begin thinking that I can make happen whatever needs to happen. I can stop praying about a lot of stuff because I think I’ve got it all together.

Then one of the kids gets sick. There’s some problem at work. I get attacked and I’m brought right down. I’m reminded again of how dependent I am on the Lord and how willing He is to answer my prayers with good things. What kinds of things? Good gifts – things of the kingdom.

God cares when our day goes poorly; He is aware when we receive bad news. Our dear Father in heaven looks at us and our situation like a compassionate doctor who patiently listens and empathizes with my situation. Then he prescribes what is necessary.

God displayed Himself as the generous Dad in heaven from the beginning of time. He created the world, plants, and animals. He

created man in his own image and entrusted man with ruling responsibilities over creation. The Generous God said – “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” Our generous Dad brought the animals to Adam for naming. When no suitable helper for Adam was found, God created woman.

Then man and woman rebelled against the Almighty Generous God. This grieved our generous Dad. All His generosity was met with rebellion; sin was now part of the world. This sin resulted in a serious breach between God and man.

Because of His holiness, the generous God responded to this sin with a just sentence. In fact, God’s holy wrath was aroused because of the seriousness of sin. God’s wrath means He intensely hates sin. That is good news because it means God does not delight in sin nor does He treat it lightly. Both the Old and New Testaments warn of the coming wrath of God upon those still in their sins.

But because of God’s great mercy and His willingness to pour out His generous gifts, God sent the greatest gift the world has ever seen; the gift of God the Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus went to the cross to take

the punishment of sin that we deserved. Romans 3:25 – “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.”

We can gain protection from God’s wrath on our sins only by throwing all our trust upon Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. When we put our faith in Him, God pours the generous gift of the Gospel into our lives. We become the children of our generous Dad in heaven. If you have never put your faith in Jesus Christ, He calls you to do it now. Bow your head; admit you are a sinner like the rest of us; trust Christ to save you and God will pour the Gospel in.

Christian, remember all the generous gifts of the Gospel God has poured into your life. Remember that He continues to pour Himself and His gifts into our lives each day especially in response to our prayers. Ask.

If you’ve got business frustrations, ask the Lord for His help.

If you wonder whether to stay or go at work, ask for wisdom.

If you’re unemployed pray, ask the Lord to direct you to ads He wants you to see. Lord, please grant me your words in this interview. Please open doors for me where you want me to go.”

If there is strife at home, ask “Lord, how can I contribute to harmony in this home. Bring peace to our home.”

Married folks ask “Lord continue to deepen my love for my spouse. Help me to help them some way today.” This past summer, I met a senior friend who has greatly impacted many people. His wife is now quite debilitated by a stroke. He spends much time caring for her. You might think that he would resent the imposition on his time. Yet his statement was “I am so happy to be able to do that for her. I am honored to care for her in this way. She’s cared for me in so many ways over the years.” Maybe we need to pray “Lord, empower and strengthen me to embrace my vows more fully and passionately than I have over the past few months.”

Ask God to bring you friends that will complete you, complement you and stretch you. If you’re struggling in life or don’t care about things right now; will you bring that to the Lord? “Lord, I bring my lack of passion before you. I know you did not create me to live a dull joyless existence. You are the creator of color, music, human beings, brains and the Himalayan Mountains. So though my

life may be pretty ordinary right now, you are not. Lord, help me to discover more of You.”

Families ask the Generous Heavenly Father for wisdom to say No gracefully and submit our calendar to your priorities.

Or maybe you’ve got a presentation to do this week or a project to finish or an exam to write. Generous Dad in heaven, please help the technical aspects of my presentation to go well; please grant me clarity in communication; I pray for focused attention as I do my job. Help me not to let myself get distracted by destructive shop talk or bad mouthing others. Empower me to remember “whatever I do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Col. 3:17.

Moms at home, ask the Lord to help you find the soother and for strength for this day. God is the most famous and powerful person in the universe, He invites His children to come and ask. God is not distant and uninterested. He is a perfect Dad in heaven who will respond and act upon our requests giving us His good gifts. So let us do that now...

- Dear Father, I don’t want to treat you like Santa Claus, but I do need to ask things of you. Give me, please, food to eat today. I’m not asking for tomorrow, but I am asking for today. Please forgive me for the infinite offenses to your goodness that I have committed today . . . this hour. I’m not even aware of most of them. I live too unaware. That in itself is a sin against heaven. I’m sorry. Increase my awareness.
- And in my ignorance, if I have asked for things that would really be destructive, please, do not give them to me – do not lead me into temptation. Do protect me from the evil one. For Jesus’ sake – Amen.