



Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"
(Matthew 7:7-11)

One of my favorite Christmas memories from my childhood has to do with a gift that came from my father. My dad and I didn't have the smoothest of relationships, and I think that's why this particular memory stands out all the more. I was maybe ten or eleven years old, and back then slot car racing was all the rage; every boy (and probably some girls) wanted a slot car racing track of their very own. (If you're too young to know what I'm talking about, Google it. And believe me when I tell you it was pretty cool.)

That stuff could get pretty expensive, and my parents were of modest means, so I figured the closest I'd ever get to one was dreaming about it, which I probably did plenty of nights leading up to Christmas. But there was my dad on that Christmas morning, smoking a cigarette, sitting in his favorite chair - the one nobody else was allowed to sit in like his hero Archie Bunker - and me crouched on the floor with just one package left to open. My dad just looked at me and said, "Well, go ahead." When I tore off the paper and saw what lay beneath, I jumped into his lap and wrapped my arms around him. My mother must have known this was going to be a Kodak moment because in one of our old family scrapbooks there's a fuzzy picture of my father and me in one of the few times in my life that we would ever embrace like that with such unadulterated joy.

I think about that Christmas morning every year, and I remember how Jesus reminded us that if parents know how to give good gifts to their children, then how wonderful the gifts that God gives are going to be.

God gives all kinds of gifts. Maybe not the ones we thought we deserved, or the ones we prayed for, or the ones that should be so obvious, but the ones God knows we need. Like the strength to forgive someone. Or the mercy we don't deserve. Or the proper motivation to do the difficult, but right, thing. Or the insight we had to have in order to understand someone else's point of view. Or the courage to admit a mistake and ask for pardon, which could in turn save a valued relationship.

As we are just a few days away from unwrapping all the goodies under the Christmas tree, what is the best gift you have ever received? What is the best gift you have ever given? And what gifts are you receiving from God, at this very time, that are helping you develop a deeper spiritual life? After you have given these questions honest consideration, and if you have just a moment, I'd love to hear your answers. As a way to stay connected and engaged, shoot me a quick email and share your giving or receiving stories. (pastorchuck1@gmail.com) I'm confident we will both be blessed by doing so.

Blessed Christmas,

Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. O Giver of all good things, thank you for the blessings of this season, and for the opportunity to reflect on the gifts we have received from you, and the gifts we have given to others. Keep us focused on the greatest gift of all, the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.