

LESSON 3

Learning to Ask God to Provide

As a member of His family (the church), God wants us to ask Him to meet our needs, to ask him what we should give, and to ask Him where we should serve.

This week you will address an important question that presents an opportunity for your class to pursue the heart of God, as relates to provision in general, and specifically for your church's campaign. There are two dimensions to this question, which you will explore today:

- Why do we have to ask Him to provide, if He already knows the need?
- Why do the people have to be asked to participate? Shouldn't they just want to contribute?

Author Rick Dunham sums it up well: "The ability of a ministry to fulfill God's calling is in direct proportion to its ability to fund its work."ⁱ In other words, just as we ask His insight as to direction (i.e. calling), so too we ask His clarity as to provision (i.e. funding).

The problem arises in one of the great lies of American culture: you can make it on your own. Independence may ring true as a political or social concept, but there exists no scriptural basis for accomplishment apart from the "life-sap" of Christ. Indeed, to the contrary.ⁱⁱ Such purposeful dependence marks the maturing disciple of Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ The curious convergence of humility and initiative reveals an inquisitive heart that longs to know the deep things of God, and then to act on them in faith.

Your goal in this lesson is to communicate the reality of our need for the Father's gracious provision, and the importance of developing a heart of humility that knows we can approach the throne of grace with confidence.^{iv} Equally important is helping them recognize that in being asked, they and other members are given a choice to participate. By choosing to submit to the vision for growth and ministry, and learning to surrender things they value, they align themselves with God's heart.

Think About It:

SCRIPTURE TEACHES US TO COME HUMBLY BEFORE GOD WITH OUR REQUESTS.

Translated in scripture as a request or petition, the word "supplication" simply means you are asking God for, or to do, something. The use of this word in Philippians 4:6 directly connects our petitions to our conscious choice to be grateful and not to be anxious. James 4 goes even further and shows that the motive behind our asking carries great weight and affects the outcome. The message in these and many other verses is clear. The Father is not put off by our asking; to the contrary, He desires it and He knows and takes into account our motivation in asking.

Asking God for help – be it insight, answers, involvement, practical assistance, protection - puts our focus on His

LESSON 3

Learning to Ask God to Provide

power and strength and takes our eyes off the distraction(s) of the enemy. Scripture teaches us that Satan distracts, divides, and destroys.^v Therefore, the spiritual battle we wage^{vi} takes on new energy when we consider the great responsibility we share in managing God's resources in our physical world.

Talk About It:

A) HOW DO WE LEARN TO ASK FOR THINGS, WITHOUT BECOMING SELFISH IN THE PROCESS?

Petitioning God is about aligning our will with his, not simply bringing him a wish list. When this happens, "the desires of our heart"^{vii} begin to resonate with His priorities and perspective. Delighting ourselves in Him means that our attention is on Him and our motivation is to bring glory to His name, not our own. When we have a heart to meet needs and manage well what we're given, we do so with a focus on others, not ourselves. This honors the gift of Christ on the cross.

B) ASK YOUR CLASS TO SHARE AND CELEBRATE FAITH-INSPIRING EXAMPLES OF HAVING ASKED GOD FOR SOMETHING SPECIFIC – BE IT HEALING, SALVATION, PROVISION, JOBS, INTERVENTION, FAVOR, OPPORTUNITY, ETC. – WHERE HE SHOWED HIS POWER AND CONFIRMED HIS LOVE FOR THEM.

Remind your class that part of the reason they come to church is to live life together as the family of God. That means learning to (a) be bold in sharing what God has done for us, and (b) learning to rejoice with those who rejoice without being jealous. Sharing testimonies releases great faith through both the telling and the hearing.

Think About It:

SCRIPTURE TEACHES US TO BE WILLING TO SURRENDER WHAT WE HAVE.

God wants our hearts, not our stuff.

The response of the rich young ruler^{viii} shows that our affection for material possessions can easily supplant a desire to follow Christ. At the core of this issue is the question of surrender: does what I hold onto bring greater fulfillment to my life, compared to what I gain by giving it up?

Again, we can simplify the concept like this: "It looks and feels like it's mine, yet I know He gave it to me; therefore I willingly sow it, by faith, to advance His sovereign purposes." In the context of your capital campaign, the decision to relinquish control or possession of that which is "ours" is in large part prompted by the invitation from our leaders, i.e. the "asking" for our participation. This speaks directly to the interconnectedness of surrender with submission.

Reinforce to your class that material prosperity factors significantly into God's unique purpose. (1 Tim 6:17-19) However, point out that personal or congregational abundance is never the end goal, rather it is always a means to an end (v19). For this reason, an ongoing conversation with Father is imperative (reference last week's recipe of

LESSON 3

Learning to Ask God to Provide

Pray, Walk, Choose), that He may expose our clinging fingers and that we would respond to His admonishment and leading.

Talk About It:

WHAT MIGHT GOD BE CALLING YOU TO SURRENDER, TO PERSONALLY PARTICIPATE IN OUR CURRENT CAMPAIGN/PROJECT?

Explore this question from the standpoint of life in general, not just with a focus on money, or stuff. It might include behaviors, attitudes, or activities. Remember, it's not that He is necessarily going to ask us to give [x]; it's about our willingness to do so, if He does.

Reiterated to your class that to whom much is given, much is expected. Compared to the world in general, our disproportionate amount of wealth as American Christians means that we bear far greater responsibility with respect to God's Kingdom. This should be viewed not as a burden but as a privilege. Resources have not been given to us to keep; rather, we are to sow and to invest, all the while rejoicing in the beautiful cycle (Luke 6:38) which God has established and confirmed.

Suggested answers: allowance; specific items that can be donated and/or sold to give \$; spending time reading the Word or praying instead of playing video games; going to bed earlier to read your Bible instead of watching TV; not participating in a sport or activity that costs \$ to join, and giving the \$ to the campaign; etc.

Lesson Summary

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to rely on Him for strength, wisdom, guidance, and provision. The Word of God encourages us to ask, in many different places, for the things we need to accomplish His work. Coming to God teaches us to be humble in our walk and expectant in our faith. It trains our hearts to trust those who lead us by serving with a right attitude. And it encourages us to understand what surrender looks like in real life, when the opportunity to live with less is presented to us, and we have to choose.



Suggested "object lesson" craft or activity:

- Color or Draw a scene of supplication, submission, or surrender. This is a great week to focus on the Artwork for the Kids' "Stew-Art-Ship" Display, if your church plans to do that.
- "Who's in Charge" All of your students, at various times, participate in settings where an adult is the authority. (They are in one now!) This simple game is meant to convey the blessing of following instructions (i.e. being obedient). A series of simple instructions can be given to the class (akin to "Simon Says") and those that participate receive the "blessing" (candy, pretend dollars, etc.) Show how the blessing can then be shared and/

LESSON 3

Learning to Ask God to Provide

- or put to specific use (i.e. the money can buy items, or the candy can be shared).
- “Ask and You Shall Receive” Assign a “leader” who holds a small bag of candy, and who is to be asked by various classmates for a piece. The leader must decide to whom, and when, and how many pieces – but never to withhold completely. When asked for two, maybe they give just one. Help them not to show favoritism, but rather, to respond kindly to a reasonable request (versus “Give them ALL to me!”). Perhaps some receive it right away, while others must wait. Discuss the reality of allowing God to decide how the blessing comes, and not dictating it.
- “What Do You Have” Play this two-team game by dividing a number of toys, blocks, etc. between the two groups. But do so without them seeing what the other team has. Taking turns, have each child describe something – a color, a material – and if the other team has something resembling the description, they need to surrender it to the asking team. Put a fun spin on the game by allowing a team to give (i.e. surrender) a toy or item before the other team describes it, at which time the “giving” team then takes a turn giving a description. The idea is to focus on the giving of the item, not on the amount held by each team at the end. Sometimes the item is asked for; other times it is offered before the asking.



Memory verses:

- **Phil 4.6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.
- **John 10.10(b)** I have come to bring life, and life more abundant.



Family Action for this week:

- How do you ask for things in your family? Politely & patiently? When it comes to asking God, is it more like telling God what you want, and expecting Him to do it the way you want, when you want?
- Decide as a family what it means to “wait upon the Lord” and discern what submission and surrender need to look like in your family. Bear the fruit of generous works in your family first; then they will happen in your church and community.
- Count the cost. Submit to God's principles and honor your leaders in specific, overt ways. Make a list of things or time or talent that you can surrender – to a family member or neighbor in need, to Goodwill, to your campaign.

LESSON 3

Learning to Ask God to Provide

i	Rick Dunham, <i>If God Can Provide, Why Do We Have to Ask for Money?</i> Dunham Books, 2007
ii	John 15:5
iii	Phil 4:13
iv	Heb 4:16
v	John 10:10
vi	Eph 6:12
vii	Ps 37:4
viii	Mark 10:1-227