

Luke 11:11-13
How to Get the Holy Spirit

Main idea: God gives us good gifts. In fact, God gives us the best of gifts.

Moms are an amazing gift from God, amen? The stuff they often do for us and the stuff they put up with for us is superhuman at times, right? Every once in awhile, I talk with someone who says that their mom wasn't so great, and yet, they're standing there talking to me, and that alone attests to the fact that their mom did a lot for them. I mean, we literally wouldn't even be here without them! So on some level, you've got to be thankful for your mom!

Our moms gave us life. Our moms fed us, at least for those nine months as we leached off of their bodies. Most of our moms encouraged us, and taught us, and most of you had moms that brought you to church every Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, because God was their God and Jesus was their Savior, and they wanted to teach you to always follow the Lord.

And yet, not every mom is a good mom.

From time to time, we hear on the news about a mom who did something horrible to her children. A little over a week ago, a mom in Georgia was given a cake for her birthday that had marijuana in it, and she left it within arms reach of her 5 year old son, who ate some for breakfast and went to school stoned. Another mom in Michigan recently left her 2 year old son alone in a hot jacuzzi, and when first responders arrived at the home, he was submerged under the water, and he had burns on half his body. He was rushed to the hospital, but didn't survive. And a mom in Oregon earlier this year plead guilty to throwing her 6 year old son off a bridge because he had autism.

Not every mom is a good mom.

In fact, if we're completely honest, there are no good moms, no perfect moms, because every mom, like every person, is a sinner. Some moms do a pretty good job of hiding that reality, and others don't. But if we're going to believe what Jesus said about such things, we must admit that every mom, every dad, every single one of us, in fact, is not good, but has broken God's commands.

[Mr. Nice Guy video]

Narrator: Meet Mr. Nice Guy. You think you're nice? This guy is really nice.

Mr. Nice Guy: Well, I try to do what's right.

Narrator: He's so nice, that if good people get to heaven, he'll be the first person in line.

Mr. Nice Guy: Aw, shucks.

Narrator: So, Mr. Nice Guy, have you kept the Ten Commandments?

Mr. Nice Guy: Pretty much.

Narrator: Do you mind if we take a look at this and maybe see how nice you really are?

Mr. Nice Guy: Uh, okay.

Narrator: Great. Here's one. You shall not lie. Mr. Nice Guy, have you ever told a lie?

Mr. Nice Guy: Well, yeah, who hasn't?

Narrator: What do you call someone who tells lies?

Mr. Nice Guy: A liar.

Narrator: Alright. How about another commandment? You shall not steal. Have you ever stolen anything? Even once?

Mr. Nice Guy: Nope.

Narrator: But you just told me you're a liar.

Mr. Nice Guy: Well, I did steal some candy once when I was a kid.

Narrator: And what do you call someone who steals?

Mr. Nice Guy: A thief.

Narrator: Alright, let's try another one. You shall not commit adultery.

Mr. Nice Guy: Aw, that's easy, I'd never cheat on my wife.

Seductive Woman: Hi handsome!

Mr. Nice Guy: Oh, baby!

Narrator: Ahem, Jesus said, if you even look at a woman with lust, you've already committed adultery with her in your heart.

Mr. Nice Guy: Oh, uh, right.

Narrator: One more. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Have you ever used God's name to curse?

Mr. Nice Guy: Oh my ***!

Narrator: That, Mr. Nice Guy, is called blasphemy. God gave you life and breath and everything you have, and you drag His name through the dirt. So, by your own admission, you're a liar, a thief, a blasphemer, and an adulterer at heart, and that's just four of the Ten Commandments.

Mr. Nice Guy: Ok, ok, so I'm not perfect.

Narrator: Well, actually, it's worse than that. Suppose we could put a chip in your brain that could record all your private thoughts for an entire week and then play those thoughts on a giant movie screen for all your friends and family to see.

Mr. Nice Guy: That would be embarrassing!

Narrator: Yeah, I know. The Bible says God knows everything. Even the secret thoughts of your heart.

Mr. Nice Guy: Well, compared to some people, I'm a saint!

Narrator: Yeah, that's true, but the standard is God's law, not other people. Besides, even if you sin just five times a day, in one year, that's 1,825 sins. And if you live to be 70 years old, you'll have broken God's law over 127,000 times. You'll have to answer for every sin on Judgment Day, when the Bible says each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Mr. Nice Guy: But, God will forgive me, right?

I like that video because it reminds us that all sin is sin, and that we're all evil sinners. The book of James says that even if you keep the whole law, and yet stumble at just one point of it, you're guilty of breaking all of it.

I worked as a residential counselor at a group home for troubled boys while I paid my way through seminary, and in our training for that position, we were told to tell the boys there that they were not bad, but only that they occasionally did bad things. This is the prevailing psychological theory being taught everywhere in our world today, schools, Hollywood, even many churches, that we're basically good. But it's not true. It's true that we were originally created good, even very good, but we sinned. We broke God's commands. And we continue to break God's commands. Every time we lie. Every time we lust. Every time we overeat, or neglect to help someone in real need because we rationalize that they're not really in real need. Every time we have a good thought about a good deed, but don't follow through, we sin, because the book of James also says that anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. I mean, I don't know about you, but that happens to me all the time! So it should be abundantly clear that we're not basically good, but completely sinful, because no one is good but God alone.

Well, anyway, we were told to tell these boys that they weren't bad, but good. And most of the counselors who worked there told them that over and over and over again, so often, that the boys knew to expect to hear it after they had engaged in inappropriate behavior. So one morning, when I was working with some older boys, they got into an argument with each other. Usually the arguments start about who gets to pick what they watch on tv, but quickly proceed to talking about each other's mothers, and not in a Mother's Day kind of way. So I stepped in and redirected them to a more positive conversation. Afterward, I was talking with one of the boys, encouraging him to make better choices next time, and he said something like, "But I'm still good, right?" And I said, "No." And he looked at me like, "I can't believe you said that!" So I said, "No, you're bad, just like me. The Bible calls it sin. We've all sinned against God, but if we ask Him to forgive us, He does." Now, this particular boy had already confessed to know Jesus as Savior, so he knew where I was coming from, but because he'd been lied to about his own nature so much, he still felt a degree of lostness. So rather than surrendering his sin, he often continued to fight for himself, so that he might finally feel peace and rest in this world.

And I wonder how many people living in the world today have never been told that there's something deeply, deeply wrong with us. We feel it, but we try to suppress it, because we've bought the lie that this is our home. And if this is our home, then we've got to make the best of it, and that means always thinking the best of ourselves, even when we feel like deep down, we're not okay on our own. We need God to help us. And God is good, so He does help us. But how He helps us is far greater than we could have ever imagined.

Luke chapter 11, starting in verse 11.

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 11:11-13)

Father, forgive us for being evil. Transform us, and make us more like You, who gives us good gifts by Your grace. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Our passage this morning starts with a question. "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?" So I'm going to ask the same question to all of you. Only, I'm going to open it up, since it's Mother's Day, to include mothers as well. So if you've ever been a mother or a father, I need you to stand up. I need all the moms and dads to stand up. Ok, now, if your child asked you for a fish, keep standing if you'd give them a snake instead. And not just any snake. Not a pet snake, but a snake that you know will bite them and cause them to get sick and maybe even die. If you'd give that kind of snake to your child, keep standing, otherwise sit. Anyone? No?

Okay, what about this next one. Stand back up moms and dads. Come on, last time. Okay, if your child was hungry and asked you for an egg, keep standing if you'd give them a scorpion instead. And keep in mind that the scorpions in that region generally had stings that were very venomous. The sting would swell up and be extremely painful. Your hands and feet would become cold and your skin would turn pale, and the pain would get worse and worse until eventually, you would die. Would anybody here do that to your child?

Why not? We've already established the truth that we're all evil sinners. I mean, Jesus even says that in the next verse. "If you then, who are evil..." You see, we're all evil, so it's amazing that we know how to give good gifts to others at all!

But God is good. It's in His nature to give good gifts.

So if we, who are evil, know how to give good gifts, how much more will the heavenly Father! Because God is not evil, but good! And every truly good thing that we receive is from God, because He's the giver of good gifts. So when you receive something good from someone else, thank them, but also thank God, because ultimately it came from Him. Because God uses imperfect people, even evil people, to do His will, and to bless others with good gifts. So praise God for everything, because from Him comes life and breath and everything. Every good gift, and even the best of gifts.

At the end of verse 13 it says this:

How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!
(Luke 10:13)

Jesus said something very similar, almost word-for-word, once before in the Sermon on the Mount, except there, instead of mentioning the Holy Spirit, Jesus said that God gives good things, or many translations say “good gifts,” to those who ask Him.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:11)

And it's true that God gives good things to those who ask Him. But why did Jesus say it one way in the Sermon on the Mount, and then another way, later, when His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray? I mean, in the natural flow of the thought, we would expect Jesus to say it the way we find it in Matthew. That makes sense. It makes sense to say that if we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven gift good gifts to those who ask him! That's only logical.

So why change it to say the Holy Spirit? And where did the Holy Spirit even come from? Jesus seemed to just change topics all of a sudden, interjecting this idea about receiving the Holy Spirit. I mean, from what we read in Luke, this is only the second time Jesus ever even mentioned the Holy Spirit. And check this out, the first time didn't even have to do with us, but Himself. Jesus said this in Luke 4:18:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. (Luke 4:18)

The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus. He anointed Jesus. He empowered Jesus to preach with boldness, and to heal the sick and give sight to the blind. And it's not that Jesus couldn't do those things without the Spirit of the Lord, after all Jesus is the Son of God, and is Himself all-powerful, but it's just that being the Son of God, Jesus did everything having the Spirit also with Him wherever He went. And now, we learn that this same Spirit isn't just given to Jesus, but is given to everyone who asks God for Him. So the fact that Jesus changed it to how God gives us not just good gifts, but the Holy Spirit, should cause us to be so incredibly in awe of the goodness of God. That we, who are evil, can be blessed to have God with us, the Holy Spirit, the same way that Jesus had the Holy Spirit with Him! To empower us! To help us! And because of God's good gift of the Holy Spirit, no matter what we go through, God is right there with us to bring us through.

And that caused me to wonder: is any gift better than the Holy Spirit?

You know, we might say that salvation is better, but salvation apart from God's presence, God's Holy Spirit, isn't really salvation. God's presence with us is what makes salvation good. Without the Holy Spirit, salvation is just a means of getting what we want, using God for our selfish purposes.

Put it this way. It's awesome that God gives good gifts, but what good is a good gift if we're evil? I mean, we'll just end up using that good gift for our evil purposes. We'll end up taking that good gift, twisting, conforming it to ourselves, our own evil will, and tramping on it as if it were not good. Because we're evil, we take God's good gift and curse it, beat it, and nail it to a tree. Which is what we did when God sent His Son into the world. But this was according to God's plan, because God does something far greater than simply give us good gifts. He didn't just give us things, He gave us Himself. And because of that, God would come into us and live in us. So that God isn't far from us, but near to us, living inside us.

You see, salvation isn't just about avoiding hell and going to heaven, it's about being freed from sin. Sanctified by His Spirit, who is with us even now. So at least in terms of life today, God's Holy Spirit is the best of gifts.

And yet, salvation and heaven are eternally linked to receiving the Holy Spirit. Here's what it says in Ezekiel 37:14:

And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD." (Ezekiel 37:14)

Did you get that? Do you see what that means? It's saying that when God puts His Spirit within us, that's when we have life! That's when we can know where our true home is, the Promised Land, heaven, and we can know that God is going to take us there, not because we've earned it, but because God spoke it, and God never lies.

So how do we receive the Holy Spirit? Jesus said that we simply ask. We don't receive the Spirit, salvation, and heaven through our works. We can't make ourselves acceptable enough. We don't receive the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues, or laying on hands, or anointing with oil, we receive the Holy Spirit when we simply ask God for Him. And, you see, I think that's the same as asking God for Jesus. Because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three gods, but One. So when you receive Jesus, you've received the Holy Spirit, and He lives in you.

So the point isn't that we need to pray to receive Christ, and then pray to receive the Spirit, or vice versa. The point is simply that the Holy Spirit is far greater than anything we could ask for, and that God freely gives Him to us!

And that's the only way it could be. It's the only way we can receive the Spirit. Because, we who are evil cannot earn anything good for ourselves by our evil works. We can only receive the good by grace. And then, the Holy Spirit in you makes you good. And He helps you to do good things. And then when God sees us, he doesn't see bad people, but good people, because His Spirit is good, so that when we stand before Him on the Day of Judgment, He tells us,

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“Welcome home, my good and faithful servant,” not because we made ourselves good, but because His Holy Spirit makes us good as we rest in Jesus Christ.

So, hey, be thankful for your mom. She’s a good gift from God. But be even more thankful for God Himself, who comes to live in your heart by grace through faith.

Father, thank You for giving us so many promises. Promises that You hear our prayers. Promises of good gifts. Promises of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. And thank You that You don’t simply make these promises and wait for us to fulfill them, but thank You that you fulfill them in us by giving us Your Spirit, empowering us and changing us so that we might live and rest in You. So God, transform us even now by Your Spirit so that we long more and more for our eternal home with You. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

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