

OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:9

The Lord's Prayer – Week 2

I. INTRODUCTION

1. It was about 550 B.C. The Jews had been conquered and taken into captivity in to a distant land -- Babylon. One of the Jews' best and brightest had risen up the ranks and become one of the closest advisors to the king of Babylon. His name was Daniel. His colleagues were jealous of him and looked for a way to get rid of him. They knew that Daniel was devoted to God, and that he prayed without fail three times a day, as Jews still do today. They went to the king and tricked him into passing a ridiculous law that no one could pray to any god or man but the king for thirty days, or be thrown into the lion's den to be eaten alive. When Daniel heard the news, he didn't change. He did exactly as he had always done. He continued to pray three times a day. So, they arrested him and threw him into the lion's den. But God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions, so Daniel survived the night. The next day he was released, and the men who conspired against him were thrown in the lion's den and killed. There are many lessons from that story, but one that sticks out is that prayer is more important than life itself. Daniel would rather die than not pray.
2. Prayer should be our priority. Praying alone. Praying together. We must pray, and we must pray effectively. Our lives depend on it. Our families depend on it. Our marriages depend on it. Our church depends on it. Our community and our nation depend on it.
3. To help us pray effectively Jesus taught us to pray by giving us what is known as the Lord's Prayer, and over the next several weeks we're going to dig deep to learn everything we can about how to pray effectively.
4. Remember, the point of this sermon series is not merely to learn more, but to pray more. Not just to think better about prayer, but to pray better.
5. So, let's begin by reciting the Lord's Prayer together aloud "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day

our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

6. Remember, the Lord’s Prayer can be divided into three parts:
 - i. The preface: “Our Father which art in heaven.”
 - ii. The petitions: Six in number.
 - iii. The conclusion: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”
7. Today we are going to focus on the preface, and then next week we will look at the first petition.

II. **FOUR INSIGHTS ABOUT EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

1. **We must pray with our fellow believers in mind.**

- i. **Matthew 6:9** “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven.”
- ii. Notice the word “our.”
- iii. The word "our" is a personal plural pronoun. There are no personal singular pronouns in the Lord’s Prayer. It never says “I,” or “me,” or “my.”
- iv. What does this tell us? Three things:
 1. It is good to pray with others. Not always. Jesus often got alone for private prayer with God. In the previous passage, Mathew 5:6, Jesus said to “go into your private room, shut your door, and pray.” But it is good and powerful to pray together with others. You see this often in the book of Acts, when the early church prayed together.
 2. We must never pray for anything that would hurt fellow Christians or the church. No selfish prayers.
 3. We must pray for our fellow believers, and not just for ourselves. Praying for others is called intercessory prayer. To pray for someone else is to intercede for them. To intercede is to intervene between two parties; it is to go to God on behalf of someone else.

2. **We must pray only to God.**

- i. **Matthew 6:9** “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven.”

- ii. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus commands us to pray to "Our Father." In the previous passage, Mt 6:5-8, Jesus said to pray to your Father multiple times.
- iii. In other words, we must pray to God and none other. Not to angels, or Mary, or saints, or our ancestors, or other gods, or anything in nature.
- iv. The **Westminster Larger Catechism** puts it like this: Q179: Are we to pray unto God only? A179: God only being able to search the hearts, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfil the desires of all; and only to be believed in, and worshiped with religious worship; prayer, which is a special part thereof, is to be made by all to him alone, and to none other.
- v. Notice the five reasons given that we are to only pray to God:
 1. Only God can search our hearts. Only He knows our true desires, motives, and deserts.
 2. Only God can hear our requests.
 3. Only God can pardon our sins.
 4. Only God can fulfill our desires.
 5. Only God should be worshiped, and prayer is special part of worship.
- vi. Nowhere in scripture is there an example of God's people praying to anyone but God. Nowhere does the Bible instruct us to pray to anyone but God.

3. When we pray, we must remember that God is our Father.

- i. **Matthew 6:9** "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven."
- ii. Jesus tells us how to address God when we pray. As our Father.
- iii. This doesn't mean that we always have to address God as Father. There are other ways to address God in prayer.
 1. In the first recorded prayer after Jesus ascended, the disciples addressed God as "Lord" (Acts 1:24-25).
 2. The next recorded prayer in Acts shows the disciples addressed God as "Sovereign Lord" (Acts 4:24).
 3. Just before he died, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus," (Acts 7:59). (The Sermon on the Mount, p. 214.)

- iv. But it is important to note that Jesus instructs us to address God as Father, as if that is the best way to pray.
- v. In fact, Jesus addressed God as “Father” in every prayer except for one, when He prayed from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me (Mt 27:46).” But there He was quoting an Old Testament verse, Psalm 22:1.
- vi. Why is it important to address God as Father? Let me make four comments.
- vii. First, Jesus didn’t address God as Father, but as “Father in heaven,” or “Heavenly Father.”
 - 1. That word “heaven” adds a lot, and we’ll get to that shortly.
- viii. Second, it’s important to note that Jesus told us to address God as Father and not Mother.
 - 1. Some feminist theologians have said that calling God “Father” is outdated and patriarchal, or offensive to women. Some go so far as to recommend that we address God as Heavenly Mother. But no, God has revealed Himself as Father, and that’s how we should address Him.
 - 2. **Kevin DeYoung** wrote, "True, God is neither male nor female. He is spirit and doesn't have a body. But He has revealed Himself as Father, not Mother; as King, not Queen; as Husband, not wife. This doesn't mean the bible never describes God with maternal characteristics, but it means that if we are to be true to the example of biblical revelation, we ought to pray to God as He has named Himself." (*The Good News We Almost Forgot*, p. 215.)
- ix. Third, the more accurate your view of God, the more effective your prayer life will be.
 - 1. **J.I. Packer** said, “People feel a problem about prayer because of the muddle they are in about God. If you are uncertain whether God exists, or whether he is personal, or good, or in control of things, or concerned about ordinary folk like you and me, you are bound to conclude

that praying is pretty pointless, not to say trivial, and then you won't do it." (*Praying the Lord's Prayer*, p. 13.)

2. Addressing God as "Our Father in heaven" reminds us of some very important aspects of God's character and nature.
3. William Barclay notes that the term "father" has two distinct meanings. First, it can mean paternity -- the person responsible for the birth of a child. This requires no relationship. Second, it can mean fatherhood -- a relationship of love and intimacy and confidence and trust between the father and the child. To the Christian God is our paternal father in that He created us, but He is also our father in the fatherhood sense of the word. Through Christ we have an intimate love relationship with Him. (*The Lord's Prayer*, p. 22.)
4. So, addressing God as "Father" reminds us of God's love for us.
5. **J.I. Packer** writes, "'Our Father' speaks of the quality and depth of God's love to Christ's people -- all the sustained care and concern that a perfect father could show." (*Praying the Lord's Prayer*, p. 35.)
6. Think of how much a father loves his child, and multiply that by infinity. That's the way God feels about you. A father wants His child to talk to Him; He wants to take care of His child; He wants what is best for His child. He is interested in His child. He deeply cares about His child. He is accessible to His child. That's the way God feels about you, and addressing Him as Father reminds us of that.
7. God could have required us to call Him anything. He could have said, "Always address me as Most High God, or Almighty God, or King of kings and Lord of Lords." That's what people in high positions do. Sometimes they require that we address them as Your Honor, Doctor, Mr. President, Your Highness, Your Excellency." God could have required that anything like that and deserves much more. Instead, He simply invites us to call Him Father.

8. **Kevin DeYoung** writes, "We call on God as Father in our prayers to remind us that we are His children and He knows what is best for us... We are not bowing before a tyrannical despot or distant deity. We are praying to our Father. He is bigger, better, and stronger than any earthly father. He loves us more fiercely, understands us more deeply, and delights in us more fully." (*The Good News We Almost Forgot*, p. 216.)
9. **Hebrews 11:6** "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."
 - a. There are two requirements for effective prayer:
 - i. You must believe that God exists.
 - ii. You must believe that He rewards those who seek Him.
 - b. That's what addressing God as "Father" helps us to do. If He is our Father, then He is close, and accessible, and ready and willing to help.
10. **Andrew Murray** wrote, "The knowledge of God's Father-love is the first and simplest, but also the last and highest lesson in the school of prayer." (*With Christ in the School of Prayer*, p. 31.)
11. **Bill Hybels** wrote about the significance of the words "Our Father." "Never forget that if you are God's child through Jesus Christ, you are praying to a Father who couldn't love you more than he already does." (*Too Busy Not to Pray*, p. 55.)
12. The **Heidelberg Catechism** (Q&A 120) asks, "Why did Christ command us to call God 'our Father'?" Answer: "To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer what should be basic to our prayer -- a childlike reverence and trust that through Christ God has become our Father, and that just as our parents do not refuse us the things of this life, even less will God our Father refuse to give us what we ask in faith."

13. William Barclay points out that Christ's teaching about the fatherhood of God is best understood in the context of the predominant religions of His day. The main two pre-Christian philosophies in the Graeco-Roman world at the time were Stoicism and Epicureanism. According to the Stoics, the most important attribute of God was *apatheia*, which is the inability to experience any feeling at all. If a person can feel joy or grief, love or hate, then other people can affect him. To be able to make a person feel a certain way is to have some power over him. To ensure that no one has power over God, He must be entirely incapable of feeling anything. "He is *apathes*, passionless, emotionless, essentially indifferent." According to the Epicureans, the supreme quality of life was *ataraxia*, or complete calm, perfect serenity. If God was involved in the affairs of the world, then his serenity would be gone. Therefore, God is completely and totally detached from the world. In this context Jesus introduced God as "Our Father," a deity who is both full of emotion for us and at the same time highly involved in our lives. (*The Lord's Prayer*, p. 28.)
14. So, what kind of Father is God? He is...
- a. Caring. **1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)** "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."
 - b. Close. **Psalms 23:4** "Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me."
 - c. Consistent. **Hebrews 13:5** "I will never leave you or abandon you."
 - d. Capable. **Jeremiah 32:17** "Oh, Lord God! You yourself made the heavens and earth by your great power and with your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for you!"
- x. Fourth, addressing God as Father reminds us of the gospel.
- 1. It reminds us that the reason that God is our Father and that we have an intimate relationship with Him, the reason He is inclined to favor us is because of the cross

of Jesus Christ. And in that sense it reminds us to pray in the name of Jesus, and to be thankful for the cross.

2. Question: Is God everyone's father? Is everyone a child of God?
3. **John 1:12** "But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name,"
4. According to the Bible, there are two types of people. Children of Adam, and children of God. If you are a human being, then you are a child of Adam. But when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, God adopts you into His family and you become a child of God. According to the Bible, only Christians are God's children. Only Christians can address God as Father.
5. **Galatians 3:26** "for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus."
6. **James Boice** writes, "There are two families and two fatherhoods in this world. There is the family of Adam, into which all men are born, and there is the family of God, into which some men are reborn by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These latter children were once children of darkness; they are now children of light (Eph 5:8). They were dead in trespasses and sins; they are now alive in Christ (Eph 2:1). They were once children of wrath and disobedience; they are now children of love, faith, and obedience (Eph 2:2-3). These are God's children. These and only these can approach God as their Father." (*The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 168.)
7. One of the most important church historians of the past two hundred years was a German named Adolf von Harnack. He wrote a very influential book called "What is Christianity?" His goal was to summarize the essence, being, or substance of Christianity? He concluded that Christianity could be reduced to two propositions: The universal fatherhood of God, and the universal brotherhood of man. Unfortunately, this couldn't be further from the truth. The Bible doesn't teach the

universal fatherhood of God, it teaches the particular fatherhood of God. God is not the father of all people, only Christians. And the Bible doesn't teach the universal brotherhood of all people, it teaches the universal neighborhood of all people. While everyone on our is our neighbor and we are called to love our neighbor as ourself, only Christians are brothers and sisters, because we share the same Father through faith in Jesus Christ. (R.C. Sproul, *The Prayer of the Lord*, pp. 21-22.)

- xi. I have heard that some people have a hard time address God as Father because of their relationship (or lack thereof) with their earthly father. There are a couple of ways to handle this.
1. First, because Jesus tells us to address God as Father, we need to obey, even if it is uncomortable. However, that may be easier said than done.
 2. Second, remember John 14:9.
 - a. **John 14:9** Jesus said to him, "Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"
 - b. Jesus showed us what God the Father is really like; He is exactly like Jesus. So, get your image of God from Jesus, not from your earthly Father. In other words, don't let the character of your early father determine your view of God; let the character of Jesus determine your view of God. (R.T. Kendall, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 216.)
 3. Third, when you pray to your heavenly Father, remember the word "our" in front of it. Our Father. God is not your earthly father, He is our heavenly Father. Our Father is not the one who abandoned you; who was absent from your life; who abused you; who betrayed you; who didn't love you. Our Father is perfect; He will never abandon, or abuse, or mistreat anyone. (R.C. Sproul, *The Prayer of the Lord*, p. 26.)
- xii. When we pray, we must remember that God is "Our Father."

- xiii. Think about it this way. The phrase “Our Father” is both the requirement for prayer and the the right to pray. It is the requirement for prayer, because you must be a child of God through faith in Christ to have access to God in prayer. And it is the right to prayer, because if God is your Father and you are His beloved child, then you have the right to go to Him in prayer for all your needs and concerns. (Ronald Dunn, *Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something*, p. 186.)

4. When we pray, we must remember that our Father is in heaven.

- i. **Matthew 6:9** “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven.”
- ii. The words “in heaven” in the Lord’s Prayer are just as important as “Our Father.”
- iii. First, for those who struggle with the idea of God as Father because of their relationship with their earthly father, the words “in heaven” are a reminder that this is not an earthly father with imperfections and limitations and faults and flaws. This is our heavenly Father who is perfect in holiness and unlimited in ability. (R.T. Kendall, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 220.)
- iv. Second, remember that to pray effectively it is essential that you have an accurate view of God. “Our Father” reminds us that God is loving, and “in heaven” reminds us that God is almighty. “Our Father” reminds that our problems aren’t too small for God, and “in heaven” reminds us that our problems aren’t too big for God.
- v. **Bill Hybels** wrote that the words "which art in heaven" "is a reminder that God is sovereign, majestic and omnipotent. Nothing is too difficult for him. He is the mountain mover; he is bigger than any problem you could bring to him. Fix your eyes on his ability, not on your worth." (*Too Busy Not to Pray*, p. 55.)
- vi. The words “in heaven” do not mean that God is in heaven and not anywhere else. God is omnipresent. The point is that God is infinite, huge, transcendent, almighty, and sovereign.
- vii. **A.W. Pink** writes that if "Our Father" "tells us of God's goodness and grace, this speaks of His greatness and

majesty. If that teaches us of the nearness and dearness of His relationship to us, this announces His infinite elevation above us. If the words 'Our Father' inspire confidence and love, then the words 'which art in heaven' should fill us with humility and awe. These are the two things that should occupy our minds and engage our hearts: the first without the second tends toward unholy familiarity; the second without the first produces coldness and dread." (*The Lord's Prayer*, p. 15.)

- viii. **Kevin DeYoung** writes that the words "in heaven" remind us that our Father "is not the smartest guy in town but the all-knowing ruler of the universe. He is not the most influential man on the school board but the Lord over all creation. When we pray to God, we are not petitioning some local powerbroker or political bigwig or academic know-it-all. We are making our requests before the one who rules over all from His heavenly throne." (*The Good News We Almost Forgot*, p. 217.)

III. CONCLUSION

1. So far all we have covered in the Lord's Prayer is the preface: Our Father which art in heaven." Next week we will move on to the first petition.
2. But don't race past the preface.
3. The point of the preface of the Lord's prayer is to help us to view God correctly when pray, and also to lead us to worship. The very words "Our Father which art in heaven" should cause us to pause and worship before moving forward with our requests.
4. J.I. Packer writes that there are two ways that we can think about the preface, both of which will lead us to worship God (*Praying the Lord's Prayer*, pp. 37-38):
 - i. Either: think first of God's greatness and then remind yourself that He is your own Father.
 - ii. Or: think of God's fatherhood, and remind yourself that He is in heave, "which means that he is free from all the limitations, inadequacies, and flaws that are found in earthly parents...."

5. Last week I challenged you to make two commitments, so let me remind you what they are. If you haven't made these commitments, you can make them today.
 - i. Commit to memorize the Lord's Prayer by the end of this sermon series. To make this commitment, write the word "Prayer" on your Connection Card.
 - ii. Commit to attending every week this sermon series so that you can get the most out of praying the Lord's Prayer. Write the word "Attend" on your Connection Card.
6. Let's close by saying the Lord's Prayer together again. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."