

Father King
Lord's Prayer: Rooted & Grounded in Love
January 24th, 2016

Part I

I've never stood before an earthly king. Or the Queen Elizabeth. Royalty of any kind actually.

There are lots of people who have been knighted?

- Bono received a knighthood in 2007 for his contribution to the music industry and for his humanitarian work.
- Ben Kinsley was knighted for his role in Gandhi in 2002.
- Sean Connery became Sir Thomas Sean Connery in 2000.
- And the beloved Julie Andrews received the honor of Dame Commander of the order of the British Empire in 2000.

I wonder what it would be like to stand before the Queen? Before a King. Before Royalty.

Every so often the Church of England has a conference called the Lambeth Conference.

At one such conference Queen Elizabeth invited all the Anglican Bishops worldwide, all 800 of them and their

spouses, to come to the Buckingham palace for a garden party.

To stand before the Queen is quite the ordeal? Quite the elaborate protocol. Extensive preparation.

There's a long list of protocols that guides one's behaviour in the presence of her Majesty.

- No-touch rule
- Wait until she extends her hand to take it
- Not to grip tightly
- No fist pumps
- No hugs
- No kiss on the cheek
- No touching the shoulder or back
- When posing for a picture do not stand too close
- Now I get Police song "Don't stand so close to me..."
- Women small curtsy; men small head bow
- You address her Your Majesty
- Don't ask her about her famous grandchildren Prince Harry or Prince William
- When eating guests stop eating after the queen take her last bite
- When drinking tea, raise only the tea-cup and not the saucer; return the tea-cup back to the saucer after each sip

Pretty elaborate. Makes me wonder what's involved in an encounter with God.

Sure one day we will stand before God and see Him as He truly is, but I am talking about our encounter with Him in this life. In prayer. In quiet stillness. In worship.

Sure in the Old Testament, there was quite the protocol and risk in meeting God in an unworthy manner.

The Priests of old had to undergo an elaborate sacrificial system in order to enter into God's holy of holies.

In the temple there were these rooms. And the Holy of Holies or the most Holy Place was a sacred room. No ordinary person could enter this place. It was God's special dwelling place on earth.

In fact a thick curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. This purple veil was the divider between God and his people.

It was essentially shielding a Holy God from sinful men and women.

Anyone except the priest who entered the holy of holies would die. Even the high priest, God's chosen mediator between God and man could only pass through the veil and enter this sacred dwelling once per year. This Day was Day of Atonement.

This showed men and women that God's holiness was not to be trifled with. God's eyes were too pure to look on evil and that He couldn't tolerate sin in His presence.

Like a hot skillet evaporates water instantly, like light dispels darkness, so God's holiness can't be in the presence of sin.

This veil was there to protect – make sure someone couldn't carelessly and inadvertently enter into God's awesome presence.

Even the High Priest in order to enter into God's Holy presence had to undergo meticulous preparations.

He had to wash Himself. Put on special clothing. Burn incense so the smoke clouded his view of God, and bring blood with him to make atonement for his sin and his people's sin.

However Jesus sacrificial death on the cross changed that. When he died the curtain in the Jerusalem Temple was torn in half, from top to bottom. Only God could have accomplished such a feat.

A curtain 60 feet high, 30 feet wide and 2-4 inches thick.

When the veil was torn the holy of holies was exposed. God's presence was now accessible to all.

Heb. 10:19-22 says *“And so, dear brothers and sisters,[f] we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death,[g] Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.”*

Because Jesus has atoned for our sins and made us right before God, we can run boldly into God’s presence to receive mercy and find grace in our time of need.

That’s the beauty of the gospel message isn’t it?

That because of what Jesus accomplished in dying for us on that Day of Atonement, our sins have been atoned for.

He has taken care of the elaborate protocol. He has taken care of the extensive preparation.

Because of what Jesus did, the divine encounter Jesus invites us into every minute of every day doesn’t need to be encumbered with all kinds of rituals and preparations and protocols.

We are invited to turn up just as we are. There is nothing we need to do other than be our self.

Isa. 55:3 “Come to me with your eyes and ears wide open, and you will find life.”

That’s it. Just be yourself. No fasod. No pretense. No faking necessary.

Communion

I am going to invite Randy and Melanie up to read.

Then we are going to listen to the words of Michael Card, “Come to the Table” and then I will pray and invite us to come.

Song “Come to the Table”.

Prayer

Part II

So Jesus has taken care of the elaborate protocol. The extensive preparation has been taken care of, so we can come as we are in His presence.

It’s that easy.

To come to God as we are, without pretense. Open heart – no hiding – easy right? Fact is, it’s not that easy.

Benner says “Openness to God demands trust. This is far from our natural posture – in relation to God and to

others. The natural posture of most of us is guardedness and pretense.”

Ever since the fall in Garden of Eden we live with the consequences of sin – we cover and protect with fig leaves; we love to hide our most vulnerable parts.

Our sin, our wounds, our regrets, and fears.

But in Christ, our heavenly Father invites you and I to come to Him in faith and trust which expresses itself in vulnerability and brutal self-honesty.

The crux of the message this morning is that if you want an open heaven, you need an open heart.

When I was in grade 8 I put my trust in Jesus. To forgive me. Be my leader. Friend. Father...my everything.

I made this public declaration on Jan 18th 1981 when I got baptized that I am with Jesus.

I am His and He is mine. His banner over me is love. Set me on a whole new trajectory, towards life and not death.

I surrendered, the best I could.

I was brutally honest with God where I was at...confessing my broken places...my fears and sin and darkness and longings and desires...

I came to God in vulnerability and brutal honesty.

And Jesus met me. Set me on a whole new trajectory towards True Life.

But the longer I journey with Jesus the more I realize just how shallow that initial step of trust really was.

Not insignificant, but shallow. I hadn't yet experienced the depths, I hadn't plumbed the depths of my sin not the depths of God's grace.

Just like the day I got married; I was so in love. I was bursting at the seams. I could hardly contain myself.

But the longer Kenda and I are married, the more I open my heart to her, the more I risk, the more I come to know of her, the more I open my heart and allow myself to be loved, the more my love grows.

The same it is with God.

Daily we are asked to come before God in this same vulnerability and brutal honesty just like the very day this journey of faith began.

I can give you so many examples of what this looks like both recent and not so recent...

As a youth pastor I remember coming to God in prayer....feeling a block I admitted to Jesus that I was afraid. I detected ambivalence in myself.

And as soon as I admitted fear, I was flooded with the presence of Jesus.

Open heaven requires an open heart.

This is why we have spent so much time on knowing God as Father. Knowing God as Father involves a step of trust where we open our true selves to Him in vulnerability and honesty.

“Our Father...”

But for so many this idea of God as Father is fraught with feelings of disappointment, pain, anger, and in some cases an awful sense of abandonment.

Confusion around God as Father – the solution is to run to Jesus.

Philip had the same desire, “Show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

John 14:9 which says, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

We can hear Him say, “The Father is just like me. This Father is just as good, just as gentle, just as kind, just as

compassionate, just as approachable, just as vulnerable, just as welcoming just as generous.”

Jesus’ arms are the open arms of the Father. Jesus’ open heart is the open heart of the Father.

Jesus came to help us know his Father, as He knows Him; to love His father as he loves him, to trust the Father as he trusts Him.

We come as we are.

No wonder the Step III in A.A. is “We entrusted ourselves to God as we understood God.”

But isn’t this the way we all approach God?

As we understand Him.

This is the way it is; it’s part of the problem isn’t it?

All of our understanding of God is shaped by our earthly experiences, both good and bad.

That’s why we need Jesus to move us through the Lord’s Prayer, to follow Him into His understanding of Father.

As we follow Christ’s lead we discover so much more about this Good Father.

One of the 1st things we discover is ...

We discover he is Father King.

The Lord's Prayer begins with "Our Father, who art in heaven..."

Interesting that we have both. Father. In Heaven.

Both - not one without the other.

I like how **Darryl Simpson** explains it.

In Father we see the will to do what is asked.

In Heaven we see the ability to do what is asked.

I never liked the idea of God in heaven. It seems to suggest to me as a kid that God is way up there, standing off from a distance.

This deistic approach to God. He created, now he stands distant from us, un-approachable and distant.

In-active. Untouchable. Aloof.

This is not what the phrase "in heaven" would have suggested to the 1st Century Jew living in Palestine.

"In heaven" literally means "in the heavens" or "all around us."

In our culture we have come to think of heaven being "above us," but it also means "beneath us and alongside us."

We are surrounded by the heavens. The heavens are the atmosphere in which we live. Heaven is one of those dimensions, very close at hand.

Just on the other side of the curtain. Very near. Present. Near.

Here Jesus is praying, "Father in the heavens"; "Father all around us"; Father very close at hand."

The clause in heaven would conjure up in the minds of 1st Century Jews this idea of God on His throne.

Matt. 5:34-35 Jesus says. "But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all; either by heaven, for it is God's throne..."

"In heaven" means "on the throne."

Group: What comes to your mind when you hear this phrase "God on His throne."

Darryl Johnston goes on to say,

"If this is not so, then we are wasting our breath praying the Lord's prayer...or any prayer for that matter. Sure it may be therapeutic to pray, but if the one to whom we pray is not on the throne, then we have no real hope that

He can do what we ask Him to do. At best He can say, “I am doing my best.” Jesus is telling us that there is a throne – all around us – and someone is sitting on it.”

Knowing our Father as King, we can dare to hope that when we pray the father King is listening...and at work.

I used to do street ministry downtown Vancouver. As a young adult I used to drive to Vancouver every Friday night just to walk the streets and get to know street kids. To take the time to hear their stories...and maybe have the chance to share my Jesus story.

As a pastor at NSAC I used to teach college students for one week a year in the DTES. We would sit with kids pan-handling, serve the poor and addicted...

Often as we were serving the least and the lost I would experience the presence of God. His love for people pouring through me. It was this tangible presence at times.

Amidst so much pain and heartache and brokenness and injustice...there was God's love.

No wonder Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of these you do unto me.”

I would often see this billboard driving home, “Jesus is Lord over Vancouver.”

Lord over, all around us, amidst, present and near.

Our Father... who is our King.

So if heaven is all around us, so close, so present and near, how do we access it?

An open heart.

Isn't it comforting to know that on the throne of the universe is a Father? Not just any father but a Good Father.

Yes He is the Sovereign One, the Rock of Ages, the Holy One, Yahweh, Elohim, and Creator God... But what Jesus emphasizes again and again is that on the throne is a Father. His Father. The Father He knows and loves and trusts.

And Jesus simply invites you and I to experience the Father like He does.

In our world today, in the circumstances you and I face, the injustices and atrocities people face globally, we need the assurance that God sits on the throne, and that He reins. He is sovereign. In control...even when things seem to be out of control.

Maybe you need to be reminded today that God is on His throne. Sovereign and in control.

Maybe you've opened your heart to others and as a result you've been wounded, and as a result you're tempted to wall up your heart, shut down and not risk opening your heart again.

God's word to you today is open your heart. Keep your heart open to the Holy Spirit and to others.

This is why we have spent so much time on knowing God as father and knowing ourselves.

If we don't know ourselves, and know and trust God...our understanding and experience of God will be shallow at best.

The thing about the Lord's Prayer is that it is a prayer. Not just good theology.

Prayer is meant to be all about being open to the Father, present to our Beloved King. Prayer is so much more than giving God our grocery list; it's about intimacy.

It is meant to be experiential. It's not so much about changing God, but putting ourselves in a place where we are changed. Transformed.

But in order for transformation to take place we need to come to Him as we are, in vulnerability and brutal honesty.

David Benner tells a story of his friend who's an Agnostic.

To be an agnostic means you are unconvinced of the existence of God. Not sure. And in this case she was generally uninterested in the possibility that there was a God to even give it a second thought.

Maybe that describes you. If so, that's OK. Its good to admit where you are...exactly. Again, to not feel like you need to fake it, or pretend something else is going on for you.

But in this case, this lady tells David that from time to time she prays.

Usually when she finds herself thinking or pondering questions of existence or the meaning of her life.

So David posed her a question, because he was interested to hear how she prayed.

And so he asked her. She told him that her prayer usually goes something like this.

"I am not sure if you are there, or if you are, whether or not you are listening, or if you're there and listening, whether I can trust you, but just in case..."

What she didn't realize was that how she is praying was in fact a Christian prayer.

She was acting on the faith she had. She wasn't trying to muster up any more on her own.

Sure it isn't much faith but just like the widow's mite and the generous act of giving that she displayed in the gospel story, David's friend dared to give what faith she had back to God.

Any time we do that is prayer.

Benner goes on to say, "God will always hear any prayer that is born out of honesty and expresses whatever amount of faith we actually have."

What God desires is honesty and vulnerability before Him. That's when we meet Him.

Thomas Merton reminds us that God is far too real to be met anywhere other than in reality."

Thus when we attempt to meet God in our place of falsity and pretense, we should be surprised that God is nowhere to be found.

He goes on to say that "Prayer is the encounter of the true self and the true God. This is what gives prayer it's transformational potential. Honesty gives God Access to the truths of our life, and to the realities of our existence.

Sadly however, the self we so often bring to God is our lying, pretending, posing false self that we think God

wants. That false self we have constructed to protect us from the vulnerability of our nakedness before God and others."

So as we come to know and trust this loving good father, we are able to come before Him as we are, not as we think we should be."

We approach this Father with the amount of faith we have, and cry out to Him.

Our Father... Our King

Let's look again at this triangle.

I want to share a picture with you that might help you better understand the impact that the right understanding of God as Father has on our hearts.

King

Father

Authority

Obedience

Identity

As we open our heart to Jesus who is the way to the Father, our experience of Him grows and develops and enlarges.

What if our obedience looks like nothing more than obligation? What if our obedience is guilt driven? Very rarely out of love? What if it is a bunch of legalistic rules and boundaries, all driven by fear?

What does that reveal about our understanding and experience of Father God?

What if our identity is not as holy and dearly loved children of God, secure in who we are as children of God; that we belong to Him?

What if our identity is more defined by our mistakes and failures? An identity that is more shaped by the labels the world, the flesh and the devil have projected on us?

What does that reveal about our understanding and experience of God as father?

What if we have no authority? What if we have felt that we have long lost our authority in Christ? No godly authority in our praying, in our leadership.

What if we are experiencing no power either? No power over temptation. No power for godly living. No power to love well.

It says a lot about how we experience God as father and God as King doesn't it?

Imagine building a tent, trying to put up a tent and the centre pole is not anchored well. Not strong. Flimsy. The tent wouldn't be sturdy. Wouldn't be worth trying.

This is why Jesus invites you and I to follow His lead and come to know His Father King as He does.

This is the invitation.

Isa. 54:2 says, Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes."

Out of our experience of God as Father, a good Father flows healthy identity and obedience.

Out of our experience of God as King, we grow in authority and power.

As we grow in our experience of Him these truths become more and more a reflection in our own lives.

Ephesians 3 says, "I pray that from his glorious unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength..."

That "we will have the power to understand how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is."

Our authority in Him will develop and mature.

Our prayer life will begin to take a different shape.

In Christ you will re-claim the authority you once lost. You will take back that which was stolen.

In Him you will begin to discover your God given purpose.

Eph 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

It's true, our power and authority, our identity and obedience all flow from intimacy and experience of God as Father and as King.

As this grows, our hearts expand. We grow in love for God, self and neighbor.

From this place of growth as holy and dearly loved children of God suddenly our sphere of influence is expanded.

The tent pegs are broadened. The cords are stretched. The tent becomes not just a two-person tent but encompassing so much more.

Acts 17:28 says "In Him we live and move and have our being."

Human beings, not human doings.

Not just sphere of influence – that is merely a byproduct of knowing God's love; as our hearts open to His large – this can't help but spill over into our relationships.

As we grow in our understanding and experience that we find our true being...in love, we become all we were created to be.

This is the way of Jesus.

His goal is to correct our understanding of Father...and to replace our misguided concepts of Father with the truth.

He invites us to come to know the father as he does.

Philip once asked Jesus, "Show us the father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus response was simply "If you have seen me you have seen the Father."

Put your trust in me, and I will lead you to the Father.

I am the way; the truth and the life...follow me.

Put your hand in His. Put your trust in Him.

To do this Jesus breathes on us His Spirit...he breathes in us his spirit.

For Romans 8 says you have now been given the spirit of sonship, daughtership, by which you cry out to God my Abba Father. You have not been given the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.