

# The Lord's Prayer

## *"Our Father in Heaven"*

Matthew 6:9-14

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on May 8, 2022

### INTRODUCTION

- There's a story about three pastors who were on an old-fashioned telephone conference call. (Just imagine a Zoom call but through a phone and the phone is wired into the wall). These three pastors were talking about the most appropriate and effective ways to pray. As they were talking, a telephone repairman was working on the phone systems in the background.
  - The first pastor shared that he felt the key to prayer was to put your hands together and point them upward in symbolic worship. The second pastor suggested that the best way to pray was on your knees. The third interrupted and said, ***"You are both wrong, the only way to pray is stretched out flat on your face."***
    - By this time the phone man couldn't stay out of the conversation any longer. He interjected, ***"I found that the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was dangling upside down from a power pole, forty feet above the ground."***
- When we introduced the Lord's Prayer last week we said that most people begin to pray when they are faced with difficulties too big to handle. There are family problems, so you pray. Exam time is coming, so you pray. We must say again for emphasis that this is good and right. Pray begins by simply opening your mouth and God, like any good father, is pleased when his children simply begin communicating with Him.
  - But just as a child learns that there is more to their relationship with their parents than requests, so we learn that although requests are always important, there is more to prayer than just our list of needs.
    - But as we try to mature in prayer we find that it is not so easy. What do we say? How do we approach God? Moreover, it seems like there a million methods and books on prayer all teaching different techniques and ideas.
- Prayer feels like an uncharted jungle that we try to hack our way through, often getting lost and discouraged.
  - That is how the disciples felt as well and so they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus did not respond by saying, ***"Prayer is hard but just keep hacking and you will find your way"***. No, He gave them guidance and instruction. He blazed a trail through the jungle for them to follow.
    - And this trail is well trodden. In the 2000 years of Church history the great stress has not been on hacking out your own trail of prayer but on learning what it means to follow the trail. To Jesus and to our forefathers, the Lord's Prayer is this trail.

- This is good news. You see, prayer is not an uncharted jungle. It is a trail blazed by Jesus himself and walked by billions of Christians throughout history. The way is clearly marked out. We simply have to learn how to walk in it.
  - So following Jesus and our forefathers, we're asking, ***"What does the Lord's Prayer teach us about how we are to pray?"***
    - Last week we introduced the prayer and today we begin with the first line: "our Father in heaven." There are two parts to that opening line: we are to address God as "our Father" and as "in heaven." So, let's unpack these two parts to see what each teaches us about prayer.

## OUR FATHER

- So, the first question I want to ask is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 02) what is Jesus teaching us about prayer when he tells us to pray to God as "our Father?"**
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 03) Answer: God invites His children to come directly to Him, relating to Him as a loving Father.**
- Notice first of all that Jesus teaches us to come directly into the presence of God.
  - We do not have to do anything to cause God to listen to us as in so many other religions.
  - We do not have to go through a priest as if we are one step removed from God and need someone to speak on our behalf.
  - Neither are we to pray to Mary or the saints, as intermediaries who are closer to God than we are.
    - No, we are invited to immediately and directly come into the presence of God.
- Even more astounding, we are invited to come, not as groveling puny human beings before a great and powerful God, but as children coming to a Father.
  - This is huge. Jesus reveals that God wants us to relate with Him not just as Creator and creature, as King and subject, or as Master and servant, but in a relational, intimate, loving way – as a child to a father.
    - In fact, the first word in the Greek sentence is not ***"our"*** but ***"father"*** to give emphasis to it.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 04)** This was revolutionary in Jesus' day. The Jews of Jesus' day preferred the exalted titles of God like ***"Sovereign Lord"***, ***"King of the universe"***, ***"Holy One"***, ***"Almighty"*** or ***"Lord of Hosts"***. In the Old Testament God is referred to as a ***"father"*** only 14 times and generally speaking it refers to him as the father of all creation or that God is ***"like"*** a father.
  - Scholar Dale Bruner points out though that **(SHOW SLIDE 05) "For Jesus, God is not simply like a Father, behind who stands a more awesome God. God is Father."**<sup>1</sup>
  - Scholar Craig Blomberg adds that, **(SHOW SLIDE 06) "Use of this intimate term for God was virtually unparalleled in first-century Judaism."**<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Dale Bruner, *Matthew – The Christbook*, 294.

<sup>2</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, 119.

- Yet in the four gospels, Jesus refers to God as **“father”** or prayers to him as **“my Father”**<sup>3</sup> some seventy times.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 07)** We get a picture of Jesus’ intimate relationship with God, the night before He died. Look at Him in the Garden. He knows that his time has come. He knows he is about to be crucified by God, to drink the cup of God’s wrath and judgement. As Jesus considers what it means to be forsaken of God, He is overcome with emotion and anguish so much so that Mark says he **“fell to the ground”** and the first anguished words from his mouth are, **“Abba, Father”**. In the hour of his greatest need he calls out to His father.
  - Let me ask you something: What language is this word **“Abba”**? It is Aramaic. Do you know what language 99% of the NT is written in? Answer: Greek. Why does Mark retain the original language of Jesus and not simply translate it? Paul does the same thing in Romans 8:14: **“You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”**. Every word in Romans is Greek and then suddenly there is one word of Aramaic. Why? Why retain the original **“Abba”**?
    - Could it be that the disciples were so impacted by hearing Jesus calling God **“Abba”** that that they did not want to even tamper with it? It’s almost as if each time they went to pray they remembered how Jesus related to God, so intimately, so tenderly, so directly, and echoes of his voice led them to deeper prayer.
- Now, the shocking thing about this prayer is that Jesus is saying to us,
  - **“You know the kind of relationship I have with God, with my Father. I am inviting you into that relationship, where you can come directly to him, relating to him not just as a Creator or King but as a loving Father”**
- So that is what “Father” is meant to teach us – that God is near to us, that he cares for us, and that He fully accepts his children, and wants to relate to them.
  - We must quickly add two important footnote comments to this.

## TWO IMPORTANT FOOTNOTE COMMENTS

- First, and we must be clear on this, only God’s children can call Him Father and have this direct intimate relationship with Him where they are fully accepted.
  - Is everyone a child of God? The answer is a very small yes, but a gigantic no. You see, although the Bible teaches that God is the father of everyone in the sense that He created everyone, it is also clear that every human being, because of sin, is under God’s wrath, children of the devil, living life apart from God, outside his family love. Human beings are not, by nature, children of God.
    - The great story of the Bible is that God has acted to restore people back to himself, to save them from wrath.
- John 1:12: **(SHOW SLIDE 08)** **“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”**. Now who is the Him? It is Jesus.

---

<sup>3</sup> For further examples of Jesus praying to God as Father see: Mat 11:25; 26:39, 42; Mk 14:36; Lk 23:34; Jn 11:41; 12:27; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24f.

- Only those who believe in him and receive him are brought into God’s family. To those who see their sin and cast themselves on Jesus, they find that God not only accepts them, he brings them into His family.
  - The only way you can approach God as Father is if you have His Son. This is why Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Do you have the Son?
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 09)** Second footnote: some people have really bad earthly fathers and so find it hard to view God as a Father.
  - My first-year room-mate in college used to tell me how his father would line up him and his brothers and beat them until they were all on the ground or the hospital. That will give you a poor view of fatherhood.
    - If that is your experience then this prayer is a gift to you. How so? Dale Bruner says it best: **(SHOW SLIDE 10) “the remedy for a bad father is not the . . . removal of any father figure at all; it is the gift of a finally good Father. The Lord’s prayer gives that gift.”**<sup>4</sup>
  - Jesus gives you the gift of a father who is finally good, the father that you never had, a good and tender Father that you will always have.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 11)** So how should we address God? As “our Father.” It is not wrong to pray and address God as “Holy God” or “Awesome God,” but that is to pray to God as if Jesus has never come. Jesus’ death and resurrection, enable us to relate even more intimately to God. We don’t just stand afar and worship him as an awesome and holy God. We can approach him boldly and intimately as “our Father.”
  - The Old Testament stresses the holiness of God and how sinful human beings cannot draw near to God. The veil blocks people from coming into God’s presence. But through the coming of Jesus, everything changes. Because he dies for our sin, the veil is torn in two. We have access right to the throne room of God. JI Packer puts it so well.
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** New Testament believers deal with God as their Father. *Father* is the name by which they call him. . . . Christians are his children, his own sons and daughters, and his heirs. And the stress of the New Testament is not on the difficulty and danger of drawing near to the holy God, but on the boldness and confidence with which believers may approach him. . . . To those who are Christ’s, the holy God is a loving Father; they belong to his family; they may approach him without fear and always be sure of his fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the New Testament message.<sup>5</sup>
- So that is where our minds are to go as we begin prayer. We address God as Father and approach him like children approach a good Father who loves them.

---

<sup>4</sup> Dale Bruner, *Matthew – The Christbook*, 295.

<sup>5</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 203.

## IN HEAVEN

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 13)** But we are not just to address God as “our Father.” We are to address God as “our Father in heaven.” So, the second question I want to ask is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 14) what is Jesus teaching us about prayer when he tells us to pray to God as our Father “in heaven?”**
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 15) Answer: “In heaven” teaches us to approach our Father with reverence and awe.**
  - Literally this reads, **“Our father, the one in the heavens”**. Now, in our day we take this to mean way up there somewhere. But Jesus is not trying to tell us the geographical location of God. John Calvin explains that
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 16) “This form of expression reminds us . . . that he holds the whole universe in his grasp, and rules it by his power . . . that he is of infinite majesty, incomprehensible essence, boundless power, and eternal duration”<sup>6</sup>**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 17)** Now as I mentioned before the Jews of Jesus’ day were inclined to conceive of God as so exalted that personal relationships with him could scarcely be imagined. They needed to hear about “our father”
  - In sharp contrast, much of the church today tends to view God as exclusively personal. God is spoken of as a buddy, a pal.
- **“Our father”** may be a phrase of intimacy but **“in heaven”** reminds us that he is a father to be respected and revered.
  - Friends, I am convinced that one of the greatest reasons why the world does not care about God is because the church today has forgotten the soul trembling magnificence of God and has presented a mushy sentimental God.
    - The world does not notice because the God the church often presents is so small and pathetic.
- Charles Misner, a specialist in general relativity believed this is why Albert Einstein had so little to do with the church.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 18) “The design of the universe...is very magnificent and shouldn’t be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically religious man. He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing. My guess is that he simply felt that religions he’d run across did not have the proper respect . . . for the author of the universe”<sup>7</sup>**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 19)** What the church needs today is a fresh vision of the exalted and majestic God. This begins in prayer. When we pray we are not sauntering into the presence of a peer, we are coming into the presence of the Holy One of Israel. Our Father who loves us is...
  - The one makes heaven his home and earth is but a footstool to him.

---

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, ch 20, 187-88.

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *Let the nations be glad*, 11. Original quote from: “*First Things*”, Dec 1991, No. 18, 63.

- The one in Job 38 who laid the earth's foundations and told the waves of the sea, ***"here your proud waves halt"***
- In Daniel 4, ***"His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth."***
- The living creatures that encircle his throne never stop saying, ***"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come"***
- He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He is God Almighty and our worship and prayers to him demand a deep element of respect and reverence for He is ***"the one in the heavens."***

### THE NECESSITY OF "FATHER" AND "IN HEAVEN"

- Do you see then the absolute necessity of approaching him both as ***"Father"*** and as ***"the one in the heavens"***? Jesus is trying to keep us from two false views of how we should think of, relate to, and pray to, God.
  - The first false view is an overemphasis on God being high and above us and removed from us. Most religions depict God this way and many people think that if there is a God we could not possibly know or relate to Him.
    - This leads to despair because God cannot be known and he is so removed that we wonder if he cares. But in teaching us to pray to ***"Our father"*** Jesus is saying that God is willing and eager to hear and care for us. God enters into relationship with us.
- So , if teaching us to pray to ***"our Father"*** saves us from the false view of God as unknowable and removed from us, the words ***"in heaven"*** keep us from a second false view, namely, that God is like us.
  - So many people relate to God this way. This is the domesticated all-loving mushy god of culture who would never tell you how to live your life.
    - This false view of God leads to a small and pathetic God who is not powerful enough to help us, not holy enough to command us, and not magnificent enough to fill us with awe.
- What Jesus has been trying to show us we are to pray to ***"our Father, the one in the heavens."*** Our Father is mighty and powerful and, to our amazement, we can draw near to him.
  - We find that in Christ, this supreme God has drawn near as a Father. He is not just able to help, he is willing. He is compassionate. He cares for His people. He fights for His people. He loves his children and will bring them into eternal relationship with Him.
    - The God whom Jesus says cares even about our daily bread.
- Let me try to show this balance in a picture. **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** There is John F. Kennedy in the Oval office and there is his son playing under his desk. What kids would ever be allowed in to speak to the president? What kids are allowed past security into the oval office, let alone to play under his desk. This is the President. At his command he can fire off nuclear weapons, and yet his son can draw so near to him and without fear.

- Only his children can do that. What a marvelous picture of authority and power, direct access and love.
  - This is the privilege of prayer and the boldness we can have. None would dare to wake a king up in the middle of the night unless it was an absolute emergency. And yet, the daughter of a king can walk right into the king's room at 2am and ask for a glass of water. The son of a king who burst in at 2am and say, "Dad, I'm feeling scared."

## SUMMARY

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 21)** So in summary this is how prayer begins. It begins not with immediate requests but with worship of God, with tuning our minds to who He is and how we relate to Him.
  - Prayer begins by coming to God directly, with confidence, knowing that in Christ He is your father, that you are fully accepted before Him, that His love is fully set upon you.
    - ***"In heaven"*** reminds us that we come with reverence and awe because even though He is our Father He is also God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. He is to be respected.