



Condensed Milk (Matthew 6:9-13 Series)

Matthew 6:9: How to Pray, "Our Father"

SUMMARY: *When we pray, "Our Father" we are acknowledging to God who he is to us (our Father), what that means for us, and how we think and feel about it.*

We all have a strong instinct to begin praying out of a sense of our needs, problems and fears. God wants us to begin prayer out of a deep assurance that we are loved by him. Our inclination to do otherwise, to begin with our requests, is so strong we will have to force ourselves to start prayer as Jesus says we should. It is worth it.

We so often make prayer a dry duty. We make a list of petitions and then we pray through them. Jesus says, "Don't do that. First spend time acknowledging that you are loved, what that means for you, and that you love your heavenly Father." The first proof of a good prayer life is not answered prayers. The first proof of a good prayer life is the conscious and enjoyed assurance of God's love.

There is great practical wisdom in beginning prayer this way rather than with petitions. God only promises to answer the prayer of faith. If we distrust God's interest in us, if we suspect he doesn't care, if we don't believe he is for us and on our side, how can we pray in faith? (And by the way, if we cannot pray in the assurance of God's love we cannot live in that assurance either. Get it right in prayer and you will enjoy it in life). But if we begin prayer focused on our needs, problems and fears the assurance of God's love shrinks and our anxiety is not relieved. The happy consequence of confessing God's love for us is that we begin possessing a warm and comforting assurance that he really does. We begin to know that he will listen and respond to us warmly.

¹ Psalm 103: 13-14, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; **14**for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."

Matthew 6: 31-32, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32**For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

When our youngest daughter was about four years old, I walked past her playing with toys in the living room. On an impulse I said to her, "Hey, Jenessa, did you know that I love you?" She rolled her eyes and responded, "Daddy, I *know* that you love me!" Feigning surprise I asked, "How did you know that!" Still playing with her toys she said, "Daddy, you *always* tell me that." In a similar way, God invites us to *always* acknowledge to him his love as our Father so that we might know that he loves us. If we know that, we can live and pray with confidence.

The Lord's Prayer then is a distinctly Christian prayer. Only those who are the children of God can pray, "Our Father". And only those who trust in Jesus to bear their sins and bring them into a relationship with God can become children of God. "Yet to all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). It was true then and it is true now as well. If you have never received Christ as your Savior, you should do it now. As his children God gives us a love no less than the love he gives his own "beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). This means that nothing "in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39), not even our own failings.

Prayer, then, is first and foremost the expressed enjoyment of our relationship with God. God is relational and a relationship is what he wants with us. All petitions must be based on this reality if they are to be prayed in faith.

Practice Exercise: Write at least one sentence of prayer that expresses this theme. The verses in the footnotes can help you with this as you reflect on them.¹

¹ John 3:1, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.



Condensed Milk: Questions for... **...Matthew 6:9: How to Pray, "Our Father"**

Content Questions:

1. What stands out to you in this article and why?
2. What advantage is there in beginning prayer as Jesus says?
3. What is the first proof of a good prayer life?
4. Why is the Lord's Prayer a "distinctly Christian prayer"?
5. How does one become a child of God?

Discussion Questions:

6. What kinds of things might we say to God when we pray the theme "Our Father"?
7. What does it mean to you to be a child of God?
8. What does it mean in the Bible to be a child of God? (Is it simply a title, a metaphor, or is it something more than that?). See the Bible verses in the reading, footnotes and Matthew 7:11; John 1:12-13, 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1 & 9, and so on.
9. What do you think our heavenly Father is like as a father?
10. Some, who have had a negative experience with their human father struggle to think of God as their heavenly Father. How does one get past that struggle?
11. If we are the children of God what are the implications for prayer?

Take-Home Practice:

In the prayer journals you've been given try to journal a prayer that begins with the theme, "Our Father" each day this next week.

