

Matthew 6:7-15 **Feb. 19, 2023**
Exodus 20:7; Psalm 113:1-5

Our Father, Whose Name Is Holy

There is a prayer Christians have repeated around the world for two millenia. It is prayed in every language that Christians speak, often when they gather for worship. Many know it by heart. It is a prayer so familiar that for far too many it has become rote. Most of you know this prayer. It begins, *Our Father, who art in heaven...* But how many seriously and earnestly pray this prayer as Jesus taught, taking to heart what we're saying and asking, genuinely expecting to live as we pray?

For the next six weeks of Lent our church will be engaged in a study on the Lord's Prayer, "Teach Us How To Pray" (and if you're not in one of those groups you need to get in one). Each Sunday I will be presenting a message that I hope will complement what we are receiving in our small groups. I will draw on the wisdom from a book that has had a profound impact on my praying the Lord's Prayer. Years ago Elmer Towns wrote, *Praying the Lord's Prayer For Spiritual Breakthrough*.¹ Additionally, I will share the wisdom of John Wesley, from his sermon, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, Discourse VI," (1748). I highly recommend that you be in one of our small groups for our lenten study "Teach Us How To Pray" and that you read Towns' book and Wesley's sermon.

Our focus on this familiar prayer is for the purpose of enhancing our understanding of Jesus' teaching about prayer, so that we may get closer to our Savior, to have a genuine, honest-to-God, relationship with Him, as we are encouraged to pray The Lord's Prayer daily.

A Prayer from Jesus Himself

Why has this prayer endured down through the ages and, like communion, become so integral to Christian worship? Because it comes straight from Jesus Himself as He models His relationship and communication with God His Father; and because it is a complete prayer and says all we need to say to God in our prayers. It is not the only prayer that Christians can and should pray. But it is the best. And praying as Jesus taught, in private and in public, and most especially in spirit and in truth, will bring great benefits to us in our living. Through this prayer we deepen our relationship with our heavenly Creator, we get in touch with the wisdom and truth that gives us meaning beyond the daily rush, and we are transformed in ways that God has planned for our lives and which we truly desire deep in our hearts.

There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer in the Bible: Matthew 6 and Luke 11. Each is set in a slightly different context. It could be that Jesus gave instruction more than once, or it could be that Matthew knew that Jesus taught this prayer in this setting about prayer in general; and Luke - who came later - knew this prayer of Jesus, but he didn't know the context so he put it the context of Jesus' own example and direct instruction to his followers. Either way the Lord's Prayer is a model for Christians to follow.

We must remember that Jesus' disciples weren't totally ignorant about prayer. No doubt they had all heard people pray, in synagogue, in the home, in duress. Some of them probably even said prayers themselves. But there was something about the way Jesus prayed that drew them in. His praying was real faith in God, not a religious show. Formal and archaic language is not necessary to address God ... in fact it could be a hindrance. Genuine prayer must come from the heart, not superficial pretences to being religious. Adam and Eve tried that once with a fig leaf. It did not go well.

Don't we all know people who go to church who do not show the love of Jesus? We know people who know Scripture, but sometimes use it as a weapon. We know people who study the Bible, attend church, but all their faith is in themselves, or their feelings, and not the God of the Scriptures.

Real prayer, real faith is not just religion. It is from the heart, honest, real ... actually knowing and serving God. Many times when people reject God they are actually rejecting dead religion, not realizing that Jesus also rejected dead religion in favor of a living relationship with the living God.²

There are slight differences in the two versions (you can read them in your Bible) and Matthew's version adds a benediction "...for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever;" which we say when we pray it together. Many of us are familiar with the prayer in the language of the King James Version of the Bible in English - with words like "thine" and "thy." But it is just as valid to pray it with modern words "yours" and "you" or in your native language that is not English.

In his sermon John Wesley said, the Lord's Prayer "...contains all we can reasonably or innocently pray for."³ We say everything to God that we need to say. Our prayers really test our true desires: what we may not pray for, neither should we desire. The prayer consists of a preface, the petitions, and then a benediction or conclusion. The preface begins "Our Father who art in heaven," laying the foundation for prayer; what we must know of God before we can pray in confidence that we are heard.⁴

Foundation for Prayer

"Our Father who is in heaven..." this is how the Prayer begins. Jesus could have taught us, "When you pray, say, 'O God'" referring to God's unique and powerful place. He could have said, "My Lord," or "Hail, O great King!" showing God's rule over us. He could have taught us to say, "Dear Master," to show God's guidance; or "My Shepherd," to show God's care. Instead Jesus chose to use an address that speaks of a close relationship with God. And so His prayer begins, "Our Father." This is really revolutionary.

a. The God of heaven is a Father: God is in heaven, high and lifted up. He is the One who created all that is, who gave us life, the mighty and glorious ruler of the universe, revealing Himself in a burning bush, a whirlwind, full of majesty, power, and glory. And still, Jesus addresses the mighty One as Father - the Greek Bible says *πατερ*. Jesus used the Aramaic *abba* which is more akin to saying "papa" or "dad." This is the most common address Jesus used in His relationship with God. When God is our Father we can say, as does St. Paul "We cry Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15). In the family of God His children call Him "Dad" knowing that He is approachable. When we begin to pray "Our Father" we are like children of a king who can walk right into His presence - we belong

to Him. No guards, no executive staff to hinder us ... we have immediate access. At the same time heaven and earth are filled with His glory and so we should think, speak, and act, as though continually under His eye, in the immediate presence of the King.

b. We do not approach God alone: Why did Jesus tell his disciples to use the plural pronoun “our” when addressing God? Some think it is because the disciples as a group asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray,” (Luke 11:1). Another possibility is that Jesus is teaching that God is not my father alone. He is Father of angels and men, Father of all families in heaven and on earth. He extends His love and mercy to all people. If God so loves the world we ought to love one another.

And since it is Jesus teaching here, **He was inviting those disciples, and us, to join Him in prayer.** When we pray “Our Father” it shows that we are coming with Jesus to the Father. That is why we never end the Lord’s Prayer with, “In Jesus’ name.” When we begin praying “Our Father” we are saying that our prayer is based on Jesus’ righteousness, not on ours, or our ability.

Have you come to know God as your Father whom you can approach in love and confidence? Begin your prayers with “Our Father” and linger over that address. Ask yourself what it means for God to be your Father. Ask God to help you accept Him as your loving Father.

The First Petition: “Hallowed be thy name”

a. God has a name. In the Old Testament God was known by several names, but His personal name, the name that was an expression of who He is, was so holy that no one could pronounce it out loud. ***You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God...*** **Exodus 20:7.** God’s personal name was written in the Scriptures but when devout Jews came to the name they said “Adonai,” which means “Master” or “Lord.” When Jewish scholars copied the Scriptures they chose a new pen with which to write God’s name so they would not dishonor God by writing His name with a pen that had been used to write other words. After using the pen, they broke it so it could never be used again.

b. God’s name is holy. “Hallowed” is an old word not used much these days. Perhaps you’ve heard “the hallowed halls” of the university or the “hallowed” precincts of say Independence Hall in Philadelphia. “Hallowed” means respect that has grown over time. It means “holy,” and holy means separate or set apart. When you pray “Hallowed be your name” you are not rushing into God’s presence to demand something, nor are you concerned about your sins or your ability to pray. When you pray “Hallowed be your name” you are not placing conditions on God or making a deal with Him; like “I’ll go to church, or I’ll start giving money, or I’ll read my Bible, if You’ll answer my prayer.”

“When the insistence is on the point that God answers prayers, we are off the track. The meaning of prayer is that we get hold of God, not the answer.... We look for visions from heaven, for earthquakes and thunders of God’s power ... and we never dream that all the time God is in the commonplace things and people around us. If we do the duty that lies nearest, we shall see him. One of the most amazing revelations of God comes when we learn that it is in the commonplace things that the Deity of Jesus Christ is realized.”⁵

When we pray, “holy be Your name” we are saying that God, whose name is an expression of who He is, is separate from anything on earth, being neither sinful nor profane. We are praying that God may be known for who He really is, that He may be duly honored, respected, and loved, by all whom He has made capable of knowing and loving Him.

c. God wants our **praise**. Jesus taught that God wants truehearted worshipers, **... the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks, John 4:23.** Begin your prayers with “may Your name be holy” because the most important thing in prayer is that God’s name be magnified and exalted. God doesn’t need our help or advice but wants our worship. **Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and forevermore, Psalm 113:2.**

Yes, we are children of God who can approach Him as our Dad. But too much informality displaces our sense of holiness and reverence. The purpose of the Lord’s prayer is to set God in His rightful place in our lives. It is about putting God on the throne of our lives on earth, as He sits upon His throne in heaven.

d. God will **not force anyone to praise His name**. The Lord’s Prayer and the Bible teach us that God is sovereign, the King. The Bible also teaches us that we have free will. Worship is a choice. God wants and commands our worship. People don’t worship God because they don’t know Him, or they simply refuse, or are so busy they crop God out of the picture, they actually worship other things. Still, the Lord waits. When you go to God with your praises, He comes to help you with your problems. God reaches down to touch you as you reach up to touch Him.

Praying This Week

There are seven positive and valuable results that come from praying the Lord’s Day daily. We have learned of the first result today: **You will magnify God each day when you pray, “Hallowed be Thy name.”** As we worship God, He rewards us with His presence. It’s like the little boy or girl who greets his/her dad at the door when he returns home and asks, “Daddy, what did you bring me?” And the dad replies, “I brought myself.” When you worship God, He will come to you. Even if you have no earthly father around, or your earthly father was not ideal, you do have a Heavenly Father and **your Heavenly Father will come to you when you pray.**

The Bible reminds, **Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice, Psalm 55:17.** You can pray this prayer when you awaken each day or when you retire, or in the middle of the day. You can pray while you’re doing many of your daily tasks.

The Lord’s Prayer is not about posture, place, or what you wear. The Lord’s Prayer is about an open heart to God. Pray it slowly, let your mind or lips linger over the words, concentrate on what you are saying. This allows for God’s Spirit to seep into your soul. “Our Father in heaven...may Your name be holy in my duties today...as Your name is holy in heaven.”

Make the Lord’s Prayer a regular part of your day. The secret of your future lies in your daily routine.

Let's start now, as we pray together: Our Father, who is in heaven ...

¹ Elmer Towns, *Praying the Lord's Prayer For Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997).

² Eric Metaxas, *No Pressure, Mr President, The Power of True Belief in a Time of Crisis*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 34-35.

³ John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount, Discourse VI," (1748); Outler & Heitzenrater, *Wesley's, Sermons, An Anthology*, (Nashville, Abingdon, 1991), 228.

⁴ *Ibid*, 228.

⁵ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*, Feb. 7, "The Discipline of Dejection" (Urichsville, OH: Barbour Books, 1963).