

Pray Like This (Week 2) - Our Holy Father in Heaven **Sermon Summary**

Yesterday we began our deep dive into the Lord's Prayer, or, Our Father prayer. And, remember, it's not that Jesus Himself necessarily prayed this prayer verbatim, it's more that it represents the themes, tone, and topics of Jesus' own personal prayer that was so alluring to His followers that they wanted to learn to pray like that too.



Our:

- The single feature that unites the entire Lord's Prayer is its plurals, "Our Father," "our daily bread," and so on. Thus, this is not an individualistic prayer, but a collective (as church historian Justo Gonzalez puts it, "The Lord's Prayer declares that we are never really praying alone.")
- How we pray should move us toward and connect us with others, not isolate us from them or make us feel superior to them.
- We should be praying as intensely and passionately for others as we do for our own lives; the kinds of things we pray for ourselves we ought to be praying for others too.
- United Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton summarizes it this way: "We live in a world that focuses on me, my, and mine, but Jesus teaches us to pray our, us, and we...God is not simply the God of Protestants but also of Catholics and Orthodox believers. God is not simply the God of conservatives but also liberals. God is not the Father of any one nation or ethnic group but the Father of all nations and peoples. He is not merely the Father of Christians, but the Father of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and even atheists and agnostics who don't believe in Him...If you share the same Father, you are family with these others."

Father:

- Jesus had many words available to Him as a way to address God in prayer. In both testaments, the most common labels for God are translated into English as "God" and "Lord." Yet this is not how Jesus taught us to address God in prayer: He says we should come to God as "Father/Parent," a more relational, familial word.
- To not pray to God who is our Father/Mother/Parent is to skew our prayer, and how we see God, in potentially unhealthy ways. As James Mulholland in his book on the Lord's Prayer puts it, "Whenever I forgot to whom I am speaking, my prayers change. How do I get the King to give me what I want? How do I influence the Judge to rule in my favor How do I get God to be interested in me?...When I come before God with my complaints and demands, when I ask for what I think will satisfy, seek what I hope will fill my void, and knock at doors I want opened, I am like a distrusting child. In those moments, my Father in heaven scoops me into His arms and says, 'Peace. Be still. Trust me.' Only then do I quiet myself and relax in His presence."
- One more tidbit about God as Father for Jesus, one that was cut from the sermon itself due to time constraints: the first, and most consequential, use of the image of a father for God in the Old Testament is during the Exodus (Ex. 4.22-23). This attaches the idea of God as Parent to

themes of rescue and liberation. There is no doubt that Jesus' disciples picked up on that. So when we pray to God as our Father/Parent, biblical scholar N. T. Wright says our mindset ought to be, "Let a new Exodus be now, let it be for me, let it be for us." That is, we should go into prayer expecting our God as divine parent to use our time in prayer to pull away from that which is killing or enslaving us, and to pull us toward new life.

Who is in the heavens:

- It's not "heaven," but "heavens," and that's due to how the ancient world understood the cosmos. There was earth, and then varying levels of heaven - the stars, the realm of spirits, and then God's own abode. "Heavens" in the Bible also refers to all that exists beyond human perception, and God's final future that is coming. So it's a fairly comprehensive term - and Jesus' point is that the God to whom we pray is everywhere in all of that, present and future.
- This, of course, leads to the kind of admission you see in Deut. 10.14-15 and Psalm 8: the God who is everywhere still knows us as intimately and well as He knows everything else.
- An ancient Christian prayer practice built upon this idea is to pray with your eyes open, not closed, so that everything you see - from the tall trees to the neighbors across the street to the other cars on the road to the small hairs on the back of your hand - reminds you that God is fully and immersively in all things.

Holy be Your name (or, Make Your Name Holy):

- This is the first of seven asks/petitions that will define the rest of the Lord's Prayer.
- The "holy" word group in scripture means "to be set apart or distinctive; to be pure and sacred." It's used over 900 times in the Bible, predominantly about God Himself.
- On the one hand, God doesn't need us to declare Him to be holy; God is holy, whether or not we say so.
- On the other hand, we ought to value and revere God as if He's holy. This request is the equivalent of the first 3 of the great 10 commandments, or the Shema prayer in Deut. 6: God ought to be God in our lives - the One to whom we are ultimately committed, the One on whom we depend for life, the One who calls the shots for us - and He ought to have no rivals.
- Moreover, we are live in a holy way (in all we say, do, choose, avoid, etc.) because God our Father is holy, and as His children we want to represent His own character well (see 1st Peter 1.14-16). To not live in a holy way as children of a holy God is to profane - the opposite of holy - God's name and our witness to others (see Romans. 2.23-24).

Praying this Week

Use what you heard yesterday, or reviewed above to shape your prayer this week:

- You might recall Pastor Chris saying that the opening phrases of the Lord's Prayer very clearly find their origin in an ancient Jewish prayer known as the Kaddish. If you like weaving written prayers into your own prayer life, maybe use the first half of the Kaddish this week, which sounds a whole lot like the first lines of the Our Father prayer: "May the great Name of God be exalted and declared to be holy throughout the world, which He has created according to His will. May His Kingship be established in your lifetime and in your days, and in the lifetime of the entire household of God's people, swiftly and in the near future; and say amen! May His great name be blessed, forever and ever."

- Pray as much for others as you do yourself. Everything you pray for yourself, pray for someone else too, maybe even someone quite different from you or someone you don't understand/like.

- Be intentional to pray to God as "father/parent/mother" this week. You can even imagine that every time you pray, you are like a child running into the room to talk to a loving Mom or Dad, or like the Prodigal Son making his way home to his ecstatic father.

- Go into prayer expecting it to be a little Exodus for you. Prayer is when and how God as our Parent rescues us and points us to new life.

- As described in the sermon summary, try praying with your eyes open, not closed, and marvel at the everywhere God is.

- Every time you pray this week, include a prayer of commitment - namely, a prayer that you want to live in such a holy way that God's name is seen as holy through you.

- To that end, you could choose to pray the Shema (Deut. 6.4-5) as your prayer of commitment daily: "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And as for me, I will love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, and strength."