

Praying to Our Father

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[0 : 00] All right, let's read together from the New Testament. Matthew 6, verses 9 to 13. This is the Lord's Prayer. Jesus said, Pray then like this, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. So tonight we are continuing with Jesus, preaching his sermon on the mount.

He is up a mount preaching to many people. And recently we've been thinking about what Jesus says on the mountain about prayer. And Ryan helped us last week think about how prayer, how our talking to God ought to be a regular practice in our heart and in our mind where we know that God is the one that we pray to.

In prayer, you know, we find it so difficult. I think as Christians we find it so difficult to do. It's just about speaking simply and often to our God who is always ready and able to help us.

[1 : 21] So what about the content of our prayer? That's what Jesus gives us now. This is probably the most famous prayer in the world. Likely been said hundreds, maybe thousands of times across the world today.

And Jesus gives us this prayer as a model. This is the model prayer given to steer our thoughts and help us to speak about God.

Last week we were saying Ryan was helping us see that it's not about the eloquence of our words. Now we see that at the same time there is a guide which helps us to pray well.

If you have younger children or grandchildren, I think this is quite easy to see. If your child or grandchild has fallen out with their brother or sister or friend, whoever it is, if they've trapped their finger in the door, if they've fallen over, you're probably quite used to them running to you in tears, just bubbling, getting all the words at 100 miles an hour.

And you probably just about know what's going on. But you need to take control of the conversation. Where were you? What did they say? What did you say?

[2 : 44] You hurt yourself. You know we can do something about that. It takes you, the grown-up, to give that conversation a bit of a meaningful shape. You might understand everything clearly, but you want to help your child calm down and see things more clearly.

They need you to make sense of it. And we find that as adults as well. If you've had an awful day at work, you come home and you tell your flatmate, your husband, your wife, whoever it is, how awful a day you've had. And what does it take but for them to say, no, hold on.

Let's slow down a minute and think things through more clearly. When you look at the Lord's Prayer, this model is there not to repeat word for word only, but it's there to give your conversation with God a meaningful shape, it's been called.

So, you know, perhaps this week you can say, I feel alone and I feel lost.

Well, Jesus says, God is your Father. So I can praise Him. I can adore Him for that. I don't know how exactly I'm going to cope with what I'm going through this week, this month.

[3 : 59] Well, God promises to give you just enough for today, and then He'll do the same tomorrow. So I should pray for that. Tonight, maybe you could say, I feel awful about what I've said to this person or how I have acted.

But, well, God says there is forgiveness. So I can run and ask Him for forgiveness. We are children who feel so anxious and upset and down and way down.

And some days, you know, some days we hardly know what to pray about. We hardly know what to say to God. And we are like children running to their parents. Because we need someone to give our conversation a meaningful, meaningful shape when we come to Him.

We don't need eloquence and loads of words. God knows exactly what you need, what we need. But at the same time, we are helped by this model to see clearly who He is and what we should pray for.

So, just this first line tonight. Jesus says, pray then like this. Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[5 : 10] The focus here in this first line, these first two lines, is on adoring God. When you come to God in prayer, however often you do it, do you understand who you're coming to?

That's what Jesus wants us to think about. Let your heart dwell on that reality. So, let's just look at these three points. When you pray, you pray to God who is your Father.

He's in heaven. And so, we should pray, you should pray for His name to be hallowed. So, when you pray, you pray to your Father.

What does that mean? It's a word that we use all the time. Our minister prays to our Father. When you're at home, you probably pray to your Father. You probably hear it so often that you don't register when you hear someone pray to the Father.

In John 5, Jesus meets this paralyzed man. He's been paralyzed for years. And he's lying on a mat. And he heals him just by speaking to him.

[6 : 18] The man is healed. He gets up, picks up his mat, and walks. And it's a kind of funny scene because the Jews, the religious people of that day, aren't so fazed at the fact that this man has been healed.

But what really annoys them is that Jesus has done this on the Sabbath. And so, they get up. They chase after Him. They find Jesus. They interrogate Him. They say, you know, how dare you do this on the Sabbath?

How dare you heal this man? How dare you perform this miracle? How dare you heal this man?

In the Greek, just two seconds on Greek. In the Greek, the word is pater, father, pater, where we get paternal from. And that word was a very normal word used for your biological father, a very everyday word in the sense that you could be in your bedroom and you shout, Dad.

And he'll come to you. Or maybe he won't. But it's the same sort of word. Everyday common language. How dare he call God father?

[7 : 50] That's the thought. Who does he think he is that he's allowed to say that? Well, even worse than that, now Jesus, a wee while later in Matthew 5 or Matthew 6, is saying, it's not just me who can call him father, but you can call him father as well.

You can do it as well.

It doesn't work like that. Don't be cold with your words. Don't be impersonal thinking you learned something. No, when you pray, realize that you're coming to your father.

You're coming to your father. The last two or three weeks, we have heard about German philosophers and German theologians.

And I think last week we might have got a German lesson on some words. So I'm going to jump in and give you someone else who's a German footballer. Thomas Muller. This week, he's been playing for Bayern Munich for around 17, 18 years.

[9 : 16] He was in the youth team before that. So 20-something years. There were reports that he planned to stay for one more season. This week we found out that his contract is not getting renewed.

He's not going to stay with them for one more season. And just like that, his career is over. He'll probably be gone by the summer. Whatever he is thinking is probably frustration.

He has dedicated his whole career to this club. He's trained and trained and trained. And he's given his life to Bayern Munich. And with one year to go, they decide to end it. You know, he's too old.

Maybe he's being paid too much. But you see what it is. Even for a legend like Muller, it's completely cost-benefit.

And so he's left thinking. Either he is left thinking, I did not deserve this. I've won 32 trophies with this team. I've trained and trained and trained for these guys.

[10 : 17] And now they're letting me go. Or he is thinking, I'm in trouble because I'm too old and I'm not pulling my weight anymore. I haven't worked hard enough to keep my place.

When Jesus says, don't heap up empty phrases. Just call him Father. He's saying that this relationship that you have as a Christian with God is not based on you training harder and harder and harder.

Earn in your place with big fancy words. This is simply about knowing that you are a child of God. God looks at every believer and he says, son and daughter.

Tim Keller makes the point that if you pray just because you want something, or you pray just because in the moment it's the right thing to do, and you don't get what you want, or things go wrong, you're in the same position as Thomas Muller.

Either you're left thinking, I did not deserve this because I've done my job. I've done my duty. I've prayed hard and I've prayed well. Or you think, I am in trouble and this is what I get for not pulling my weight.

[11 : 32] But when you come like a child to a father, things might not always be how you want them to be.

You might not always get what you want, but you know that the father, your father is full of fatherly love. You can't earn that.

You cannot earn that. Is this a relationship where you train and work hard for your place, or is this a family, a family relationship? Here's some clarity for you, Jesus says.

Think about who you're coming to. When you come to pray, think simply about who you're coming to. He doesn't want cold, clinical words. You can't earn anything from him.

No, you are coming to your father. You're coming to your father who counts you as treasure, Malachi says. You are coming to your father who will never, ever, ever be ashamed of you, Hebrews says.

[12 : 38] Do you believe that? If you are a Christian, do you believe that? That's how he sees his people, his children. However insignificant you feel tonight, the God who made all of creation looks at you and says, my treasure, my jewel, my son, my daughter.

Okay, who gets to call him father? Then Jesus had the right to call him father. The people didn't understand that in John 5.

The people didn't see that. But as the son of God by nature, he had that privilege. How then can anyone else call God father? Is God father to everyone?

And another question that we could ask, which gets of the same thing is, what does it mean to be a Christian? And one thing we could say is, this is all about adoption.

It means being adopted. The Bible makes clear over and over that, you know, if you read it and you turn page to page, you'll quickly realize that no one is a child of God by nature.

[13 : 53] Actually, Paul in Ephesians calls us the exact opposite. He says, every single human is a child of wrath. He says, we are children of wrath. And humans ever since Genesis 3 have shaken their fists at the Creator and have said that they want nothing to do with Him.

And, you know, perhaps you don't think of it that way, but Paul says, without Christ, without faith in Christ, without belief in Him, that's exactly what we are doing.

Our lives are defined by the fact that we look at God our Maker and shake our fists and say we want nothing to do with Him. So calling God father is not a human right.

You know, tonight you might be curious about Christianity tonight. You might believe that there is a God who is your Maker. That doesn't give you the right to call God your Father.

What gives you the right to call God Father? Adoption. Adoption. Spiritual adoption. By nature, we are not His children. By the act of adoption, God says, you are my child.

[15 : 03] You are my child. In Galatians 4, Paul says this, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His sons so that we might receive adoption as sons.

The only person who ever had the right to call God Father came and lived and died in order to clear your debts.

You know, no longer are you defined by the fact that you've shaken your fist at God. That slate is wiped clean. You can call Him Father because Christ died for sinful, broken people like you and like me.

The night before He died, Jesus was in the garden in Gethsemane. And you know what He prays? He says, Abba, Father. Abba, Father.

He just says Father twice in Aramaic and then in Greek. He's hours away, hours away from being mocked by the crowds, from being abandoned by His friends, from being hung on the cross.

[16 : 10] He cries out. And now, because He suffered, you can cry the exact same cry. Abba, Father. The Son of God suffered so that we could be called sons of God.

His cry can be our cry. Who can call God Father? Those who are adopted. How were you adopted? You received Jesus and all that He's done.

John 1, verse 12. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. Will you receive Christ if you have not?

Will you believe in your heart that Christ can save you and call you His brother or sister, no longer lost, but a child of God?

Will your prayer simply be, Father, Abba, Father. Father. Some things, just maybe a couple of things to think about this week before we go on to our second point.

[17 : 22] We don't always, when we pray, we don't always have to call God Father. We don't have to say that. You know, we say God, Lord, King. This is a model prayer.

The point is that in your heart, in your heart, you know who you're coming to. You're coming to a Father who loves you. You don't need to fix yourself up.

That's one thing. No, this is about knowing in your heart that you're a child, a child of God. God looks at every believer and says, Son and daughter. He counts you as treasure.

Know in your heart who you are coming to. Equally, on the other end of that, it's probably fair to say that we don't, or we're not struck by what it means to be called God Father.

I'm not enough. Would you pray this week that it would strike you to know that you're praying to your Father? The God who walked in the garden with Adam and Eve, the God who came to Moses in the burning bush, who gave his people food and water in the wilderness, the God who put the stars in the sky just by speaking, just by speaking, he stoops down and hears your faint cries like a father bending to a child.

[18 : 46] He inclines his ear to you. Would you come, would you fix your heart on that this week as you pray? Okay, secondly, he's our Father, and he is in heaven, it says.

He's in heaven. And again, that means a lot. He is our Father in the deepest, nearest sense. At the same time, he is eternal, he is infinite, he is unchanging.

Moses, in Exodus 33, Moses is up the mountain and he asks God if he can see him. He says, can I see your glory? Can I see something tangible here? And God says, never, never, you cannot see me and live.

God is too glorious, too mighty, too wholly different from us that we could never handle seeing him. As our Father, he is so near, so close to us, and yet, as creator, as maker, as God, he is too powerful, too vast for us to understand.

You know, we're so finite and we are so weak as creatures. That we couldn't handle knowing what God is like in himself. And so, when we say that God is in heaven, we're not talking, we're not talking about God being in a different place.

[20 : 05] We're talking about God existing on a completely different level to us. God is always ready to hear our faint, weak cries, and at the same time, he is completely separate from us.

God is so far above us that we could never know him if we tried to reach up. Just one takeaway.

That means that God is free from every single struggle and weakness and temptation that we are so prone to as finite creatures.

I know, you know, when you come to a verse like this, it speaks about God being our Father. I know that fatherhood doesn't fill us all with the same amount of joy or fondness.

Some of us here, you know, some of us here maybe have gone our whole lives with absent fathers. We've gone most of our lives with our dads who have left our homes or distanced themselves from us or perhaps we have grown up with a father in the house but who has let us down in so many ways.

[21 : 28] You know, they lack interest in our interests. They don't support us emotionally. They have seriously high expectations that we can never meet. They are critical of every single thing that you do.

The idea of a father who does not fill us all, you know, with joy fills us with disappointment or even resentment and all that we want to say to that is that for every weakness, for every way that your dad has failed you, for every memory you have of your dad neglecting your good, that loss and disappointment is healed in having God the creator as your father.

what a promise I think that is. You know, we might feel grief and disappointment for a long time.

We might never lose that experience. Here's what one Christian writer tells us to do. Dwell on the fact that there is no better father, no parent more deeply committed to his children's welfare than God the creator.

You know, if your picture of fatherhood is influenced by your own experience, would you think about that? The God of heaven is completely, he is completely opposed to every single hurtful act or word that you've experienced.

[23 : 01] he loves you so deeply and he is completely committed to your good. Maybe, maybe on the other end of that, and I hope I don't get in trouble for saying this, but maybe on the other end of that, you've had a great father.

I don't want to get in trouble for saying that your dad's not perfect either. If you think about your dad and who has loved you well, who has disciplined you fairly, who has taught you, who gives you good things in life, who really does care for you, thank God for that and know, know that when you look at your dad and see those good things, know that those good things are fully realized in God the Father.

He loves you so much, he hears every cry, he knows every need, he knows how to correct you in the most loving way. He gets it right every single time, even more than your father down here.

Would you take joy knowing that the God of heaven is so high above us in every single way, stoops down, calls us children, and loves us completely.

Last point, really quickly, Jesus tells us to pray that God's name would be hallowed. Thomas Watson, he was a 17th century preacher, minister, he gave about 20 ways in which we can hallow God's name, so this was almost a 23 point sermon.

[24 : 45] one simple way, one simple way out of many that you can hallow God's name or make holy his name, would be to set God high in your thoughts and really deeply trust him.

We hallow God's name, we lift him high in our thoughts by really believing in our hearts that God is infinitely good. We honor God when we dwell on the fact that he is not far off, he is not uninterested, he doesn't drop us as soon as we mess up.

And now this week, this week or month might be an especially hard time to think about that. You know, God is infinitely good.

I don't see that right now. Earlier on this week, I saw this short video, it was just of an older man talking about Christianity and not a famous guy, I don't know who he is, he just came up on my phone, but he's obviously been going to church for many years, and I don't know his whole experience, but I just want to read a few words, this is what he said, no health prayers answered, no career prayers answered, no spousal prayers answered, not a single prayer answered in 60 years.

Is this what following Jesus is all about? What a mistake. That's what he says, what a mistake. When you receive Christ and believe in him, and you become an adopted child of God, you don't get everything you want.

[26 : 36] Don't be like Thomas Muller who trains and trains and trains and trains and gets dropped at the last season. Your life is not founded on you earning a reward for doing the right things and praying really hard.

It's founded on God being your father, Christ being your brother, the one who died for you. That will never change and it's a test of faith.

It really is a test of faith to pray that God's name would be hallowed. We pray that we and those around us would learn to lift him high in our hearts and trust him even though the world comes crashing down around us.

This theme will come up again in the Lord's Prayer later on, so we won't say much more, but we can close with this. Our greatest need is to have more of God and to know more and more that he is our father.

If right now, if tonight, if God gave you everything that you wanted, would you ever run to God your father again? Would you ever cry father?

[27 : 52] The valley in Psalm 23, it's a place of despair isn't it? It's a place of job insecurity and poor health. It's a place of broken relationships.

God takes his children through the valley for us to learn that all we have, all we have is our father and eventually we will be with him.

Set him high in your heart. Trust him for your good. You can't earn anything but you your life is the way it is. And you will be kept safe even in trouble because Christ who is your brother has died for you and risen again.

And because the God of heaven who is your father hears your cries, stoops down and who loves his treasure. Will you cry Abba Father?

Will that be enough for you? Let's pray. Father, we acknowledge tonight who we are coming before.

[29 : 05] We thank you that you're a father who stoops down, who hears our cries. and we think of ourselves and our friends who are being brought through valleys. We pray that they would remember that the God of heaven who is their father is free from all weakness and he is infinitely good.

And so when we can only ask why things are the way that they are in our lives in this world, Lord, would our cry, would our prayer be Abba, Father.

Make that our prayer this week, we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.