

# HEART OF PRAYER

SERIES: TEACH US TO PRAY



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Matthew 6:9

First Message

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*Matthew 6:9*

Good morning! My name is Dan, and I am one of the pastors here at PBC.

I just got back last night from spending three days in Yosemite with 30 amazing young adults from our church. I left them up there yesterday, but I trust they will make their way back today. It doesn't get much better than hiking around one of the most beautiful places in all of God's creation with 30 brothers and sisters during the day and singing worship songs around the campfire at night. It was awesome.

I want to begin by asking you to think of someone you admire. Someone you look up to. Specifically, someone that you feel you have something to learn from. A mentor. A teacher. A supervisor. A parent. If you could ask them to teach you one thing, what would it be?

Now, think about Jesus. Let's say that you are one of his disciples. You've been living life with him for a few years, listening to his teaching, witnessing his miracles, sharing meals with him. Everything. If you could ask Jesus to teach you one thing, what would it be?

Maybe you would ask him to teach you to how to be a better leader. Not a bad request. Entire leadership models have been built around the leadership style of Jesus. Or maybe you would ask him to teach you how to care for people. Jesus had a remarkable ability to show compassion, figure out what people truly need, and meet them where they are. If I could ask Jesus to teach me anything, I think I would ask him to teach me how to teach. Jesus was an incredible teacher. The Sermon on the Mount. The Upper Room Discourse. The parables. Incredible!

But when Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them something, they don't ask him to teach them how to lead or care for people or teach. Their request is, "Lord, teach us to pray." As the disciples spend time with Jesus and watch his life and ministry, they pick up on Jesus's prayer life. His connection with God. His communication with God. This is the thing that they are captivated by. This is

the thing that they want to learn from Jesus. So they ask him, "Lord, Teach us to pray." In response to this request, Jesus gives what we have come to call The Lord's Prayer. For the next four weeks, we will study this prayer as we also ask Jesus to teach us to pray as well.

The Lord's Prayer appears in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. In Luke's version, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, but Matthew's version is a little longer and uses the traditional language for The Lord's Prayer, so that is the text we will use for our study.

Before we get started, there is a very real temptation that our church will face over the course of our study of The Lord's Prayer. The temptation is that we might look to The Lord's Prayer so that we can learn *how to pray*. We want to find a pattern. We want to find a structure. We want the words to say. But notice that Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them *to pray*. Before we learn how to pray, we must learn to pray. We could devote our lives to learning how to pray, but if we don't first learn to pray, it's all for nothing.

Here at PBC, if we host a lecture on theology, we can fill a room with 100 people. If we ask you to give up a weekend to hang out at Mission Springs for the Fall Retreat, we can fill the place. If we host a prayer meeting, five people show up.

I think we need to learn to pray. As a church, we need to learn to pray. Yes, we need to learn how to pray, but first, we need to learn to pray.

Here is my challenge as we start this series: Pray. For the next month, be intentional about focusing on your prayer life. Commit to prayer for the next four weeks. An excellent place to start is with The Lord's Prayer. I have prayed The Lord's Prayer every day for most of the last year. This is a powerful prayer. We will see that as we go. This prayer has the potential, literally, to change your life and your relationship with God. But it won't do anything if you don't pray. I want to encourage you to pray The Lord's Prayer every day for the next four weeks.

Please stand as we pray this prayer together.

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
The power, and the glory,  
For ever and ever.  
Amen.

## Understanding what prayer is not

The Lord's Prayer is found in Matthew 6:9-13. We are going to look at verse 9 today. But, first, it's important to look at the context in which this prayer is given. It comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins talking about prayer in verse 5, so let's begin there.

### Matthew 6:5-6:

**“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

As Jesus begins teaching about prayer, he wants us to understand what prayer is *not*. He uses the word “hypocrites”—who were, ironically, the religious leaders: Pharisees, Sadducees, teachers of the law—as an example of what not to do in prayer. They are hypocrites because they are using prayer as an opportunity to perform. That's what the word hypocrite means. A hypocrite was an actor—someone putting on a performance pretending to be someone they are not.

Some of us are actors in our prayer lives. When we pray, we are pretending to be something we are not. And usually, what we are pretending to be is someone better than we are. Better at praying. Better at loving God. Better at obeying God. Sometimes we perform for others because we want them to think that we are better than we are. But more often, I fear that we are performing for God. We want God to think that we are

better than we are. So we downplay our sin. We downplay our selfishness. We downplay our pride.

Sometimes we perform in prayer by half-confessing our sins. Do you know what I mean? We confess that we got angry with our spouse, but we don't confess that it felt good to get angry. We confess that we told a small lie to our boss at work, but we don't confess that we would do it again right now if we had another chance. We confess our sin in part, but we don't truly tell God everything that is going on in our heart. Half-confessed sin is performance. It's hypocrisy—pretending to be better than we are.

When we use prayer as a place to pretend to be better than we are, that shows that we have an impoverished view of prayer and an impoverished view of the gospel. The gospel tells us that no matter how bad we are, God still loves us. No matter how deep our sin runs, God has fully forgiven us in Christ. No matter how ashamed we feel of what we have done or what sits in the deep parts of our heart, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The gospel tells us that we don't have to be hypocrites, actors, or performers in our prayer life. Prayer is not a place to perform.

Before telling us what prayer is, Jesus wants to identify something else that prayer is not. Let's look at the following two verses.

### Matthew 6:7-8:

**“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

If the Pharisees viewed prayer as a performance, then the Gentiles—that is, the pagans, those who don't follow God—thought of prayer as a magic trick. If I just say the right things, use the right phrases, get the language right, God will do what I say. Poof!

Do you ever hear someone start praying, and they suddenly revert to King James English? *Oh holy and majestic king, thou art high above all thine creation. Thou hast blest us with this most bountiful feast of Chick-Fil-A. Blessed by thine worthiness.*

Where does that come from? It comes from viewing prayer as a magic trick. I say the right thing in the right

way and poof!—God answers me. But prayer is not about using the exactly right words or saying something in precisely the right way or talking for long enough so that God will hear us and do what we want. No.

If you view prayer that way, then you have completely missed the heart of prayer. Prayer is about something else entirely. If we are going to understand what prayer is really about, we need to know who God really is and who we are in relation to him. This is where a healthy prayer life starts, and this is where Jesus teaches us to start in The Lord's Prayer.

## Our Father in heaven

The Lord's Prayer begins in verse 9 with an address to God. It reads, Our Father in heaven.

There is so much in these few short words. I could easily spend an hour just looking at this phrase. Don't worry, I won't. But I do want to dive into this a bit.

First, note that Jesus is addressing God. Prayer is talking with God. It is not talking to yourself. It is not throwing good thoughts into the universe. It is not emptying your mind. Prayer is talking with God. This is what distinguishes Christian prayer from New Ageism.

When Jesus addresses God, he calls him Father. This is so commonplace for us today that we miss how jarring, how radical this would have sounded to Jesus' listeners. Other philosophies and religions of the day did not view God as a father. He was a far-off, distant force — the First Mover. He was an angry or malicious ruler. But he was not a father. In the Old Testament, God is talked about as the Father of Israel. But as far as we can tell, the Jews of Jesus' day did not address God as Father in this personal way that Jesus does here.

The Greek word used here is *pater*, but almost certainly the Aramaic word that Jesus actually spoke was *Abba*. This was the word that young children would use to address their fathers—something much more akin to our word “daddy.” It was a term of intimacy and affection. It was a highly relational term. When we look at the prayer life of Jesus, *Abba* is the primary title that Jesus uses to refer to God. Here, when he says Our Abba, he expands that intimate relationship that he shares with the Father to us as well.

Earlier this spring, we had a Young Adult Fellowship 5k/10k run. In the months leading up to it, I decided it would be fun to train for the 10k with my 4-year-old son,

Peyton. He was going to bike, not run, but still, six miles would be an accomplishment for him. Once or twice a week, we would train together as we gradually built up our mileage. Our training was full of mixed results. There were a lot of water breaks. A lot of “Come on, buddy, you can do it. Just a little longer. We are almost home!” My son and I worked our way up to five miles before the day of the race.

When race day hit, I learned something very interesting about Peyton — he inherited my competitive spirit. When the whistle blew at the starting line, he took off! For the next 49 minutes and 50 seconds, I did my very best to keep up with him. After the first mile or two, we were tied for the lead with John Stallings. Every time John would get in front of us, woom! Peyton shot around him like a slingshot, and I had to break into a sprint to keep up with him.

There was a water station set up about a mile from the finish line. As we approached it, I asked Peyton if he wanted to stop for water or keep going. He said he wanted to stop, and I was very relieved. As we slowed to a stop, John ran past us. Peyton gave him one look, abandoned his water and woom! No more water break. I had to keep telling him to slow down so I could keep up. When I could see the finish line, I told him to go ahead and finish as fast as he could. He sped ahead to a decisive first place win.

Peyton was so happy and excited. That wasn't surprising for me. What was surprising was how proud I was of him. This wasn't even really a race — just a fun run with some friends. He was on a bike while the rest of us were running. But I was overwhelmed by the amount of joy and pride that filled my heart as I watched my son accomplish his goal.

When God looks at you, his child, he is overwhelmed with joy. His heart is filled with love for you. He is proud of you. A huge smile comes over his face as he looks at you. He is your daddy. You are his child.

Because of that relationship, he cares for you. He cares about what you want and what you need. He cares about how feel. He cares about your health, your finances, your family, your job, your home. He cares about your joys and your sorrows, your stresses and your anxieties. He cares about every part of you.

This is the God who you pray to—your loving Father in heaven.

I know that for many of you, "father" is a weighted term. It's weighted because your father was absent, emotionally unavailable, or even abusive. Without even meaning to, we automatically transfer what we've learned about fathers from our earthly father, and we apply those things to our heavenly Father. That's natural.

But God is not a mirror of your earthly father. He is the perfection of your earthly father. In every way that your earthly father let you down, God will be there for you. He will never let you down. He will always love you and be there for you. He will always care for you, just because you are his child.

The father-child relationship that we have with God sits at the very center of the heart of prayer. If we are going to learn to pray, we must learn what it means to related to God as our Father. We must continue to internalize the reality that God cares for us. That is he for us. That he loves us and is proud of us and wants to see us thrive. If you want to grow in your prayer life, deepen your understanding of the love and care that your Heavenly Father has for you. That act alone will completely transform your prayer life.

"Our Father." Those are the first two words of the prayer. Let's think about the rest of that phrase. Our Father "in heaven." Now, when we hear the phrase "in heaven," we probably think about the greatness of God. The transcendence of God. The power of God. This is exactly what is being communicated in this phrase. The phrase "in heaven" is more literally translated "in the heavens." Our God is not confined to this earth. He doesn't live in a house. He doesn't own a parcel of land. His home is the heavens. In fact, Solomon tells us that not even the heavens can contain God (1 Kings 8:27).

Not only is God our Father who cares for us, he is also the great King of the Universe, the Creator of all that is. He is the All-powerful One. The Sovereign One. He is the One who fashioned the mountains and the seas and that breathtakingly beautiful Yosemite Valley. He is the One who created you and sustains you with every breath you take. Not only does he care about you as your Father, but he is also powerful enough to provide for you as the One who dwells in the heavens.

It doesn't stop there. You see, in the ancient world, "the heavens" were not only the space that existed beyond our atmosphere. They were that, but the heavens also extended right down to the very ground you stand on. The heavens were here, all around you, including the

very air you breathe. To pray to our Father who is in the heavens is not to pray to some far-off cosmic ruler. It is to pray to the One who is here with you, now. In this very space. In this very room. The One who knows you because he is with and because he is in.

So what? Why is this so significant? It is significant because it teaches us that God is trustworthy. It teaches us that we pray to the God who is trustworthy.

This trustworthiness of God is built on the three-legged stool found in the phrase "our Father in heaven." The first leg: God cares for us as our Father. He cares for us, he loves us, and he wants to meet our needs. The second leg: God is able to meet our needs. He is the one in the heavens. He is the Creator of all that is. He has the power to meet our needs. The third leg: God knows what we need. He is present with us. Always. He is closer than we could imagine.

Because God knows about our needs, cares about our needs, and has the power to meet our needs, he can be trusted! He can be trusted in prayer, both with the big and the small things. In moments of desperation and in times of peace. When God feels close and when he feels distant. He can be trusted.

If God can be trusted, then we are to bring our requests to him. This is exactly what we see in the rest of the Lord's Prayer. In fact, the rest of the prayer is a series of six requests. Six petitions. It is a series of six things that Jesus teaches us to ask God for.

In English, these don't always sound exactly like requests, but that's exactly what they are. These six requests are:

1. Hallowed by your name.
2. Your kingdom come.
3. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
4. Give us this day our daily bread.
5. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
6. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

These six petitions form the backbone of prayer. They give us a pattern. They give us helpful categories of requests to make to God. This week, we will just touch briefly on the first one: Hallowed be your name.

## Hallowed be your name

As I mentioned, this doesn't necessarily sound like a request in English, but it is. To be hallowed is to be made holy, so this is a request that God would make his name holy. That he would make his name famous. It is a request that the world would be full of people who know the greatness of God. The beauty of God. The perfection of God. It is a request that the world would be full of worshippers—people declaring the worthiness of God.

This is a request, but it's a request all about worship.

There are two main ways that God gives us an opportunity to participate in answer to this very request. The first is to tell people about the greatness of God, about the glory of God. This is what lies at the heart of evangelism and missions. We don't just want to tell people about what God can do for you. That by itself is just self-help. We want to tell people about the greatness of God. We want to show people that God is worthy of their worship.

John Piper, a pastor and theologian, says it this way, "Missions exists because worship does not."<sup>1</sup> Missions exist because worship does not. The reason that we are called to share our faith is that God is worthy of worship. But the world is full of people who are not yet worshipping God. Here, in The Lord's Prayer, the very first request is that this would no longer be the case. The world is full of people who are worshipping themselves or their children or their jobs or their money or their status or their cars or other false gods. The first request that we should bring to God is that he would make his glory so apparent to people that they turn from worshipping whatever lesser god they are worshipping and begin to worship the one God who is truly worthy of that worship. And we have a part in making that happen by telling people about him.

## Endnotes

1. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic; 3rd edition, 2010).