

"OUR FATHER GOD."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

October 1, 2023, 6:00pm

Text for Sermon: Matthew 6:9; John 5:17-23

This evening we turn our attention to one of the greatest prayers ever prayed, to that prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. The Master of all prayer teaches us, "When you pray, pray like this..."

This prayer is like a rich chocolate or a fine wine or a beautiful sunset, sometimes it needs to be savored. We are going to do just that. We will take our time and savor this prayer, drawing out all its sweet fruit. We will take a hold of this diamond and slowly turn it until each facet reveals more of the beauty within. Too often we say this prayer quickly and unthinkingly. So we are going to slow down and search out Jesus' meaning in each phrase.

Did Jesus mean to say pray this prayer or to pray like this or after this manner? I think the answer is both. This is a divinely inspired and divinely written prayer from the lips of Jesus. To pray this prayer is to pray within God's will. It will always be spiritually fruitful to pray this prayer. Not as mindless mantra of course or as a meaningless repetition of words, not insincerely or disengaged, or as some guilt-induced fulfillment of some religious duty. But when your heart and mind are actively engaged in this prayer, it is a powerful prayer.

Jesus teaches us in just a few brief words how we can focus on life's greatest priorities. In fact that may be the first lesson of this prayer, that it doesn't take very many words to get right to the heart of the very most important requests. This prayer is a great outline to follow with the extra benefit that it will break us from many bad habits in prayer: repetition, small mindedness, self-centeredness, churchy clichés, and boredom.

This is a wonderful prayer when you feel dry, empty, stuck. This is a way to prime the pump, and as you pray each clause, you can begin to expand on them in your own heartfelt words.

There are six great concerns covered in this simple prayer: the worship of the Father, the kingdom of the Father, the will of the Father, the provision and sustenance of the Father, the forgiveness and grace of the Father and the protection of the Father.

This evening we will focus on just that, the opening address in the words “*Our Father*” And consider four lessons Jesus teaches us about God.

First, Jesus begins the lesson by teaching us to whom all our prayers are to be addressed and what He is like.

When you pray, to whom are you talking? Who do you take God to be? What is He to you? It matters. How you start says something about your heart and attitude and posture in prayer.

Are you talking to a cosmic Santa Claus or genie in a bottle? Are you talking to a senile old grandpa? Are you talking to someone who seems to have Alzheimer’s or to someone who has to be begged into caring and taking an interest in you?

Are you talking to someone who owes you something, from whom you are entitled to ask and get what you want? Is He someone you are using as a means to an end? Someone who is at your beck and call?

Think for a moment who God is and what He is like. The psalmist ponders this in **Psalm 94:9** He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?

This verse speaks volumes to us about God and prayer. A deaf God would not make a hearing man, a blind God would not make a seeing man, a mute God, one who could not speak, would not make a speaking man.

The God who created us is personal, He hears, He listens, He sees, and He speaks. He who gave us hearts to feel and desire to be stirred up by spiritual realities, is Himself a God with desires and who knows pleasure. The God who endowed us with minds to know and wills to respond, Himself possesses all knowledge and has a perfect will.

But Jesus says something even more staggering about the nature of God, about who He is and what He is like. Jesus introduces us to God as our Father God. I shake my head in stunned wonder. This is huge.

J.I. Packer in his classic book, *Knowing God*, says, “You sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. . . . “Father” is the Christian name for God.”

In teaching us that God is our Father, Jesus is teaching us something in particular about the kind of Father He is. God is the very best possible Father. Let me show this at least *seven ways* (See Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, p. 3-5).

God is the best Father because *He is perfect* (Matthew 5:48). He is not like our human fathers. He's not subject to all the flaws and failings and shortcomings of our own fathers. He's not abusive or absent or impatient or unkind or selfish or foolish.

God is the best Father because *He has all wisdom*. He is the only wise God (I Timothy 1:17) who alone knows exactly what is best and right and when and how to give it.

God is the best Father because *He is the most loving* (I John 4:16). No parents' love for a child comes even close to our Father's love for us. If you are His child you can know no greater love than His love for you. He delights in you and rejoices over you (Zechariah 3:17).

God is the best Father because *He is the most compassionate and caring*. Scripture urges us to cast all our anxieties on him, because he cares for us (I Peter 5:7).

God is the best Father because *He is the richest*. He has unsearchable riches (Ephesians 3:8; 1:18) that cannot be exhausted. He gives more to us than the richest earthly father ever could.

Philippians 4:19-20 My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

God is the best Father because *He disciplines us* with mercy and grace in a way that always leads to our improvement and benefit. God accomplishes perfectly what parents can only try to do and then only imperfectly.

Hebrews 12:7, 9 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ... 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

Finally, God is the best Father because *He never dies*; He never leaves us or forsakes us. He never neglects us, abuses us or abandons us, and He never dies (I Timothy 6:16). He is with us always.

So first of all by teaching us to pray "Our Father" Jesus is teaching us what God is like and to whom we should address our prayers.

We are not to address our prayers to angels, or to saints, or to Mary. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, who is the Son of God. Can we address our prayers to the Son or to the Holy Spirit? If you have ever wondered about where Jesus and the Holy Spirit are in this prayer consider the second lesson Jesus teaches us when He tells us to pray to our Father.

Second, implicitly Jesus teaches us something about the Trinity.

We don't approach the Father by our self. We never come alone. The unspiritual cannot understand spiritual things. Jesus teaches, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, ESV).

Galatians 4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

Romans 8:14-16 All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 ... you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Ephesians 2:18 For through [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

When we say, "our Father," we don't come alone into the awesome majesty of the presence of God. Jesus comes with us and intercedes for us, and the Holy Spirit helps us in our infirmity and weakness to pray as we ought (Romans 8:26).

We have no relationship with the Father apart from the redemptive sacrifice of the Son and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. The moment I open my lips to say "Our Father," I realize I am being drawn further up and further in by the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, we can begin our prayers in the name of the Father or of the Son or of the Holy Spirit because they are all of the same essence as God, all are divine and all are able to hear and answer. Whenever we invoke the name of one, the others are implied.

The normal pattern of address in Scripture is to pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, by the help and power of the Holy Spirit. I sometimes begin my prayers by naming the Trinity in just that way. "Holy Father, in the name of Jesus I turn to you and call to you by the power and help of your Holy Spirit at work with in me. Hear my prayer."

Third, in teaching us to address our prayers this way, Jesus is explicitly saying something about us and the status of our relationship with God.

Jesus is teaching us something profound about God and our relationship to him, God is not merely a Father or the Father; He is our Father. Jesus is saying to His disciples, they are adopted into God's family by grace.

John 1:12-13 To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Galatians 4:4-7 When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

This prayer addressed to God the Father is for Christians only. It will not be heard and answered when offered by those who do not have Jesus as their redeemer and Mediator. Only those who come through Jesus can come to the Father. Only those who have Jesus as their Savior from sin and as the Lord of their lives, can have God as their Father. Without Jesus, God is only your judge. With Jesus ruling and reigning in our heart and life, God is only your Father.

Romans 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Have you thought about this, what it means to pray to God as Father? Have you thought about the implications of what it means to have God as your Father?

God has taken us who were enemies and adopted us and advanced us to the dignity of sons

It means you are loved with a very great love, a love no less than the love the Father has for His only begotten Son.

That the only begotten Son of God would tell us to call His Father "our Father" is humbling. To the Jews in the first century, it seemed arrogant and presumptuous at best and blasphemous at worst for Jesus to call God His Father, it implied He is the Son of the Father (John 1:14; 8:19; 14:7). What a privilege Jesus invites us into.

Fourth and finally, by teaching us to pray our Father, Jesus is giving us the ground of our assurance and confidence that our prayers are heard and answered.

He has mercy on us and has pity toward us.

Those who believe God is personal and is personally involved and interested in our lives, and that He stoops down to us in love and is truly our Father, those are the ones who have the least difficulty praying. All fear is gone, and sweet affection and tenderhearted love fills its place.

We are His children, He is our Father, of course He hears and answers. If we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Heavenly Father give to us only good gifts (Luke 11:13).

Can you think of any greater privilege in all the universe than to be adopted into the spiritual family of God as His own children?

II Corinthians 6:18 I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

I John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Of all the people on planet earth, this is a most unique calling and privilege. Only the followers of Jesus Christ can pray this prayer, for they alone have God as their Father. Only Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to say meaningfully and truthfully, “Our Father.”

It is a profoundly powerful and humbling thing for mere men to approach the throne of the awesome, transcendent, majestic, grand and glorious God and to speak in such a personal and intimate way, “Our Father in heaven.”

Our reminds us that we are not alone in coming but are many, part of the worldwide covenant family of God. It’s not just me it’s us, not just I but we, not just my but our.

In teaching us to pray Jesus is calling us not just to private but to corporate prayer, in worship, in small groups, in committees and councils, wherever there are two or three, Jesus wants us to know that we are a part of a family of believers. We are taught not just to pray but to pray together. And not just to pray for myself but to broaden our prayers to pray for our daily bread, our sins and our temptations, not just mine. Praying for each other kills pride and selfishness.

Having God as our Father reminds us not only that we are sons and daughters, but that we are also brothers and sisters. This means when we pray our Father, we don’t have a

choice about who the “our” is. It’s those who rub us wrong, those who offend us and those who don’t do what we think they should. If we are holding grudges, withholding forgiveness, harboring hate or animosities, or excluding any brother or sister from our fellowship, then we aren’t saying “our” and we must repent and seek forgiveness.

I am going to close with a prayer in which I will take this first phrase and expand on it using only Scripture. My purpose in part is to show you how you can pray the Lord’s Prayer and use it as a pattern for your prayers, expanding on each part as we seek God with all our hearts.

Prayer: Holy and Heavenly Father, grant that we may dare to call on you as Father, and to say, “Our Father.” We bow before you the Father from whom every family and from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named (Ephesians 3:14-15). (What follows is a revision of Matthew Henry’s paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer in *A Method of Prayer*.)

You are the Father of lights, and the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, the eternal Father, from whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.

You are the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ you are our Father, and the Father of all believers, whom you have predestinated to the adoption of children. And into our hearts you have sent the Spirit of the Son, teaching us to cry, Abba, Father.

Indeed, behold what manner of love you have bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God. It is almost too much to consider that the Lord God Almighty should be to us a Father, and we should be to you sons and daughters, and that as many as receive Christ, to them you give power to become the sons of God, to all that believe on his name.

Enable us to come to you with humble boldness and confidence as to a father. You are our Father in heaven, a God whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, and yet whom we may have access to, having a High Priest enthroned at the right hand of the Father.