

A Journey Through The Lord's Prayer

“Our Father, Who Art in Heaven”

[Exodus 3:14-15 & Matthew 6:9-13](#)

We are on the second week of our sermon series, “A Journey through the Lord’s Prayer.” Through this new sermon series, we want to better understand the model prayer Jesus gave us, a prayer that most of us know by heart. By intentionally slowing down and reflecting on the Lord’s Prayer line by line, we seek to grow deeper in our prayer life.

Last Sunday, we had an overview of the prayer as a whole. Jesus taught this model prayer, which is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, in Aramaic, the common language of the people of his time. Luke’s version is shorter than Matthew’s version, and it’s believed to be very close to the original form of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. But, as we know, Matthew’s elaborated and expanded version of the Lord’s Prayer became the dominant version through the course of church history.

Today, we are going to look at the first line of the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Let’s say it together: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” There is quite a bit to unwrap in this short phrase. Let’s start with the first two words, “***Our Father.***”

The Aramaic word for “father” is *Abba*. This word, which suggests a close intimate relationship with God, was a common word used for father among 1st century Jews. Jesus often referred to God using the word, *Abba*. And here in this model prayer he taught his disciples, he was asking them to do the same.

It would have been quite surprising to the disciples to even imagine calling God by such an intimate and insignificant name. As you might remember from last Sunday’s sermon, in the ancient world, the more important and powerful a person was, the longer their names and titles would be. It would have been more than inappropriate for someone of prominence and power to be addressed by just one common name.

In the Old Testament, God is described as the father of Israel a few times, but people never called God “father.” Then, what name or names did the Israelites use for God? One of God’s names is found in today’s scripture reading from Exodus. When Moses asked God what name he should give to his people when they asked him for God’s name, God said, “*Yahweh*” or “*Jehovah*,” which means “I AM WHO I AM,” or I will be who I will be. Another name the Israelites used for God was *Elohim* or *El*, as a shortened version. One more name was *Adonai*, which means “Lord.” And, many other variations of these names testifying to the grandness of God are also found in the Old Testament: names like the Most High, the Lord of Hosts, the Shepherd, the Everlasting God, Lord Almighty, the Mighty Creator, Rock of Ages, and the Sovereign Master. However, Jesus did not use any of those great names for God. Instead, he called God “Father.”

To whom should we pray? Almighty God? The Mighty Creator? The Sovereign Master? The indescribable Yahweh? We ask Jesus, and, he answers, “No. Pray to God as your Father, your Mother, or your Parent, since God is neither male nor female.” Yes, we pray to the one who has given us life. We pray to the one who accompanies us on our journey. We pray to the one who loves and embraces us unconditionally. We pray to the one who knows all of our needs. We pray to the one who suffers and cries with us. We pray to the one who heals and protects us. We pray to the one who never gives up on us, no matter how many times we run away.

And, if you notice, Jesus asks us to call God not “My father,” but “Our Father” when we pray. I think by this use of the first person plural pronoun, Jesus wants us to acknowledge and remember that God is the father of us all, regardless of our differences. Whether those differences are in age, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical and mental health ability, race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, religion or political affiliation.

Yes, God is the father of *both* Republicans and Democrats, *both* liberals and conservatives. God is the father of both Protestants and Catholics. God is the father of both Christian believers and non-Christian believers. God is the father of both insiders and outsiders. God is the father of even those who deny God’s existence. God is the father of both the poor and the rich. And yes, God is the father of both sinners and saints. So, in this world increasingly characterized by so much division, hatred, and conflict, whenever we pray the Lord’s Prayer, calling God, “Our Father,” we are praying for unity among all of God’s children. We are praying for peace in all of God’s creation.

In his book, *Our Father - reflections on the Lord’s Prayer*, Pope Francis writes, “Saying and taking to heart the Our Father means understanding that I am not an only child... if we could do so, many of us would put up a sign in front of God that says “Private Property.” God is all mine. This is the temptation. It would be easy to pray to a God who has only one child, and that child is you. Knowing instead that the Father is “ours” may make us feel a bit less alone in difficult times but also in carefree ones.”

The Lord’s Prayer is not a private prayer through which one can avoid the hardships of life and secure God’s protection for just oneself. Instead, it is a corporate prayer through which people are brought together in unity. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, calling God “Our Father,” we become less self-centered and more conscious of the people around us.

Let’s now move onto the next phrase, “**who art in heaven.**” Heaven or heavens is one of the major themes found in Matthew, appearing more than 80 times in the Gospel. When we say, “Our Father who art in heaven,” it seems to suggest that God is “way up there” or “way out there.” Actually, we are conditioned to believe that heaven is above us, in the sky, and that was how the people of Jesus’ time understood of heaven, too.

So, God who resides in a place far, far away, if that is what Jesus meant by saying, “Our Father in heaven,” you wouldn’t blame someone for shouting their prayers, constantly asking God, “Can you hear me now?” But, the phrase, “in heaven” is not about distance or geography. “God being in heaven” does not mean that God is distant, aloof, and far beyond the skies. Then, what does it mean exactly when we say that our God is in heaven?

In his book, *Fifty-Seven Words That Change the World*, Darrell Johnson points out that “In heaven” literally means “in the heavens” or “all around us.” He writes, “In our culture we have come to think of heaven being 'above us,' but it also means 'beneath us and alongside us.' We are surrounded by the heavens. The heavens are the atmosphere in which we live. We live in a multi-dimensional universe. Heaven is one of those dimensions, very close at hand. Jesus is praying 'Father in Heavens'; 'Father all around us'; and 'Father very close at hand.'” (p. 22)

Friends, God is never far away. The Greek word for “heaven” is translated elsewhere as “air.” So, when we say, “Our Father in heaven,” we are saying, “God, you who are as close as the air I breathe. You who are all around me and within me.” So, this week, as you say this phrase of the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father in heaven,” notice the movement of the air around you, be aware of the air you breathe in and out through your nose, and feel the presence of God, which surrounds you in all dimensions and resides within you.

We now come to the last phrase, **“hallowed be thy name.”** To hallow means to make holy, to revere, to respect. It is the same word translated as “to sanctify” elsewhere in the Bible. God is already holy, and so is God’s name. So, when you pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,” you are saying to God, “God, help me to respect and revere your holy name in all I do. God, do not let my selfishness and foolishness block your holiness and glory. God, use me to reveal to others the beauty of your holy name. God, help me not to use the power of your holy name as a weapon to put down others or as a magic spell to make myself feel safe.” Perhaps you can imagine in parentheses, hallowed be thy name (in my life). Because what we are doing is praying for God's holy presence to eclipse the fears that keep God confined to the role of our personal assistant -- our personal Siri or Alexa, who is called upon to fulfill our narrow needs and desires.

Would you say the first line of the Lord's Prayer with me again? "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name."

It will take time. It will take time to reorient ourselves to the powerful way Jesus was seeking to have his disciples pray to God. It will take time to see God as not just my father but our father, our mother, a parent who cares for and loves all of us, who is all around us, nearer to us than the air we breathe. And it will take time for God's name to be sanctified in our lives; for God to be God over our lives. Would you continue in committing to praying the Lord's prayer twice a day as we go through our sermon series? Once in the morning, and once in the evening. Maybe, intentionally slowing down and reflecting on the first line of the prayer, this week. Maybe inviting the Holy Spirit to help you remember not just the words, but also the meaning behind the words Jesus taught us to pray. Maybe, even consider journaling your observations as you connect to the Lord's Prayer in this new way.

And please join us next week, as we continue on our Journey through the Lord's Prayer with a look into what it means to pray for God's kingdom and will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Thanks be to God! Amen.