

The Lord's Prayer for Today Week 1 – Our Father in Heaven

Mike McCrary

Please take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 6. We are beginning this week a seven week series on The Lord's Prayer. We are going to take the Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase.

Matthew 6:9

It's got to be the most beloved prayer in human history. I was first introduced to this prayer as a football player.

We call it the Lord's Prayer because it's the prayer the Lord gave although we don't have a place recorded in Scripture where Jesus prayed this prayer himself. In fact, parts of the prayer don't even apply to himself like "forgive us our debts." But it maybe more appropriately called "**Our Prayer**" because he gives to us. And we will find as we go through this series that each phrase is pregnant with principles that speak to not only the central issues that need to be prayed out in life but also the central issues that need to be lived out in life.

It's almost as if the Lord took everything that is central to walking with God, wrapped it up and packaged it in a prayer and said here. His concern is not so much what we pray in the sense of word for word but in how we pray. Jesus says, "here is how you ought to pray." Here is what it means to walk with God and the things that you need to constantly address in your life if you are to walk with God.

So, it's our prayer as much as it is the Lord's Prayer. As we begin this series I also want you to see that **it is also a great invitation**. I get a lot of invitations to attend certain events and I cant go to all of them. But at the outset to this series I want to say that this is an invitation we cant miss. The Lord's prayer is an invitation and it hits our mailbox from the first phrase, "Our Father in Heaven."

Say it out loud.

This first phrase is obviously **identifying to whom we pray**. We pray to our God in heaven.

Notice, first of all, the **unique person of this invitation**. It's Father. You see the heart of faith is not a formula; it's not rules; it's not works; it's not a principle; it's a FATHER.

That amazes me because the next phrase is "hallowed be your name." And so we know that **God is holy** so he could have easily said "Our **God** in Heaven." Or it could have said "Our **King** in Heaven" because it goes onto to say "**your Kingdom come**." Or it might have been appropriate to say "**My Master** is Heaven" because it says that "**Your will be done**." BUT it's not O **God**, O **King**, or O **Master**...it's **Father**.

If we were to translate the Greek that Matthew wrote into the Aramaic, which was the common spoken language, we would come up with that familiar word which is so intimate, Abba...Daddy. The reason why this is unique is that we know that God has been referred to as

Father (Is. 64:8 Yet, O LORD, you are **our Father**. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.) but never in this intimate form. This is affection. This is our dad.

He is not the kind of dad that you sometimes overhear in the super market yelling at his kids, dragging them around, telling him he's dumb and telling her she'll surely never amount to anything. We're talking about Father.

If the heart of the invitation and the foundation of our faith is a father then that makes us (what?) children. We therefore have a kind of unique relationship with our God. No **servant** would ever address his king as Abba. No **slave** would dare address his master, Abba. But here we come **not** to an impersonal King or Master, we come to Abba.

A Father who just drips love, care, and grace. This is personal. This is God up close. This is God excited about every step of my growth as I am with my daughters. This is God who cares about my welfare. This is Father who's filled with dreams of what I can accomplish and not saying you'll never amount. The heart and foundation of our faith is Father. This is the person the prayer is addressed to.

I also want you to notice **not just the person to whom we pray but the privilege we have in prayer**. For it's not just Father it is "Our" father. Say those words with me.

Not just Billy Graham's, John Wesley's, the Apostle Paul's, St Augustine...but Our Father. Your father and my father. That little word *our* not only affirms our connectedness with the saints that have gone before us, and to each other as we are all brothers and sisters with one father, but somehow that little word "Our" Father **puts us all on the level ground of privilege with God**.

That insidious lie that so infects so many followers of Christ, that God probably here's some one else's prayer more than he hears mine is suddenly shattered with just one word...OUR. This is the equal access principle of the Kingdom of God.

You have just as much right to the Father and all that flows from his loving care as any other follower of Christ.

Take it one step further with me.

There's the Father to whom we pray, privilege we all have, but notice the position that is identified with Our Father in Heaven. Our Father, where?

Now this is a very Jewish expression and Matthew, we understand, writes to a predominately Jewish community uses this expression nearly 20 times. Mat. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your **Father in heaven**.

Now that is obvious but the implications are staggering. To understand this Jewish description, we go back into the Jewish Scriptures, our OT, to Psalm 115:2. There's a question that is asked that sets us up to understand what it means to have a Father in heaven. Psa. 115:1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. 2

Why do the nations say, “Where is their God?” 3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

Now we hear that question with modern ears and it sounds like questions like we probably ask as followers of Christ. Have you ever asked the question, “God where are you?” That question translated is “Lord why did you let this happen to me?” Usually that translates for us Lord, why did you let that happen to me. We’ve all asked that question of God.

But our question completely misses the point of the question the Psalmist asked because you can’t answer that question as a modern follower of Christ, you have to hear it as an idol worshiper 3,000 years ago.

You see, it’s not the followers of Christ that are asking the question; it’s the nations that are asking the question. The nations are asking of Israel, where is their god? These were idol worshipers. If you asked them where are their gods and they’d take you a temple and point to a statue, “that’s my god.” Their gods were carved out of stone and wood but the Jewish God was invisible.

Do you realize that centuries later this is the same problem the Christians had with the Romans when they were feeding Christians to lions as martyrs in the first and second century. Do you realize that as they were feeding Christians to lions we’re told the arenas would be packed with the masses chanting, “Away with the atheist, away with the atheist!” Even the Romans could go in and see their gods but this Christian God was an invisible God. So they thought that their God must not exist since he’s invisible.

So, “Why do the nations say, ‘where is their god?’” It’s the answer in verse 3, “our God is in Heaven, and therefore he does whatever pleases him [postscript unlike your god]. The following verses talk about how their God is useless because if your god can’t choose anything and even if it could it couldn’t do anything. It would its stone. But you want to know where our God is He is in Heaven and he does what pleases him.

I like that. I happen to prefer having God that can do what he wants? How about you? WE call that the sovereignty of God. It simply means this “he can act in and of himself.” He doesn’t need a prior cause to act he is the first cause. He doesn’t need a reason. He’s not a formula. You can’t put him in a box. He may decide to answer your prayer one way one time and a totally different way another time.

I fear that in our understanding of God we may begin to grasp the Our Father part but we miss the in heaven part. We lose so much when we miss the great sovereignty of God. Our Father in Heaven. What an awesome God to serve.

Donald Baloch puts it this way “God is immutable but not immobile.” This guy is a theologian and we’d expect him to talk over our heads especially that word immutable. I mean I doubt you’ve used that ten-dollar word this week at work but it has a simple meaning. Immutable means changeless. Unchanging. God doesn’t mutate. He doesn’t change. He loves perfectly. There’s no dimension that is hidden from him.

He's not only immutable but he's immobile. In other words, He changeless but he's not stuck. He changeless but he's not stuck. You'll never find the God of the universe scratching his cosmic heading wondering what in earth am I going to do next.

John Piper gives us a little insight here, "God's actions are never motivated to meet his deficiencies because he has none. But are always motivated to display his sufficient." He does what he does, why? To display his glory.

Our Father is the invitation to his personalness of God.
In Heaven invites us to the powerfulness of God.

The amazing thing is that one does not diminish the other. His nearness doesn't diminish his greatness.

Discussion:

How do you respond to discouragement or disappointment? How personal do you feel God is to you?

1. **Let God be bigger than our boxes.** He is bigger than your track record. He's bigger than what ever **discourages** you. God is in heaven and can do what he wants but he is near and personal. I feel like some have put God in a **retired** box. You've done this long enough and don't want anymore excitement and you've retired spiritually. Part of **unbelief can be being too satisfied** too quickly. Yes God has done some great things in you but God is infinite. I feel like God has said to me on occasion "Mike you been critical of the new, and nostalgic about the past, but do you really think that you've exhausted my supply." Many of us know of an **enduring** faith (I'll just make it through) but I'm talking about an **expecting** faith. Let God be bigger than our boxes.
2. **Let's take the pressure off ourselves.**
 - a. If I were to talk with you about this whole issue of human freedom and how God interacts with us, maybe its like this coin with two sides. One side is God's sovereignty. The other side is human responsibility and it His will and Our wills meshed together. Kind of like the guy who had a beautiful garden and a friend came over and said "man you have a beautiful garden." The guy said man you're right it is beautiful but you should have seen when God had it all by himself.
 - b. It's both sides. God's free to do what he wants, when and how he wants. And the other side is human will. People have debated this relationship for centuries. If people weigh heavy on the sovereignty they might call them Calvinists and those may weigh heavy on the human will side maybe label Arminiansts. I think the labels are irrelevant because I don't think anyone can totally figure God out.
 - c. In fact, in Scripture they seem to mix at times in different proportions. You know, He knocks Saul off his horse and turns him into the Apostle Paul while

was trying to do the opposite. Other times it's like the blind beggar you would have been ignored had it not been for the persistence of yelling loud and long enough to get noticed. That doesn't seem sovereign to me that seems humanly determined.

- d. You can't put God in a box.
- e. **Allow God to be sovereign in your own life. One of the problems with being young is that we tend to overstate how much we can do. How about taking some responsibility off your plate and trusting God to help.**

There is a story that has been around for decades. It's probably in the urban myth category; it's not really documented well. It's about a great Polish concert pianist, Jan Paderewski. The way the story goes, he's doing a concert at a big concert hall one time. Mom had brought a little nine-year-old kid. She was trying to get the kid excited in piano lessons. The kid thought the piano looked pretty cool on the stage, so when mom wasn't paying attention, the kid actually slipped up, walked up on stage, sat down at the bench, and started to play *Chopsticks* at the piano.

This bothered everybody who had come to hear a concert because *Chopsticks* is kind of an irritating song, and they were waiting for Paderewski to come out and play. They were wondering... *What's wrong with this kid's parents?* Everybody is wondering... *What's Paderewski going to do? How is the maestro going to respond when somebody is messing up his concert by playing "Chopsticks"?* Much to their surprise, because they thought security would come out and get rid of the kid, Paderewski himself comes walking out onto the stage. Instead of getting mad, Paderewski goes up to the piano, puts both arms around the kid on the keyboard, and starts to improvise so they are now playing a duet together. (piano playing *Chopsticks*) The way the story goes, Paderewski while playing was whispering into the kid's ear the whole time they were playing together, "I'll get you for this, kid." No, he was actually whispering, "Just keep going. Just don't quit. You keep playing, and I'll keep playing, and we're going to do something everybody will always remember." By the time the night was over, Paderewski had played all these great pieces from a concert repertoire. The highlight...the moment nobody would ever forget...was the duet playing *Chopsticks* with a nine-year-old kid, where the maestro takes this mess and turns it into something unforgettable...a masterpiece. Again, this is probably an urban myth, not well documented, but it's one of those stories that just won't go away. You kind of wonder... *Why does it live so?* You can go online, and you find it all over the place. What does it speak to in the human heart? I think it's because we're all kind of playing *Chopsticks*. We're all kind of making a mess of things. We wonder... *Will anybody come and set stuff right when it's going to cost them something to do that?*

We've got a Father in Heaven that puts his arm around us says just keep playing and I'll make a message with your mess.

Discussion:

What “messes” in your life has God turned into a “message?” What current “mess” are believing God turns into a “message?”