

June 18, 2023

“To Whom Do We Pray?”
Matthew 6:9

FCF: Not knowing who we’re praying to
PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus calls us to pray.
 (magnet) And we are to pray to our heavenly Father.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Knowing who you’re talking to can shape the conversation. I was at the PCA General Assembly in Memphis this past week - the annual meeting of our denomination. There were more than 2,000 registered commissioners in attendance, of which I was but one. That’s a lot of people. That’s a lot of name tags. And you need them - not just for folks you don’t know but for folks you do. I can’t tell you the number of times I needed a name tag to clue me in to who I was talking to. Time and mileage has its effects. So it was good to have the name tags.

Knowing who you’re talking to can shape the conversation. Prayer is something of a conversation with God. Do we know who we’re talking to? Do we know who God really is?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 6:5-15](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

When you think about it, the concept of prayer, a conversation with God, is a wondrous thing. There can be real communication. It’s profound. But, of course, there can be problems.

Here in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is addressing three basic religious activities – almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. And He gives warnings for each. On prayer, He has made clear that it is not to be a hypocritical performance or a manipulative posturing but from the heart. In fact, we could go so far as to say that the heart of prayer is prayer of the heart.

The Lord’s Prayer then follows from there. Let me say a few things about this prayer. First, it is not really “the Lord’s Prayer” but the “the disciples’ prayer” given to us by the Lord. Second, it’s not intended to be a liturgical form set in concrete but a model prayer to be used as a guide. And third, there is this transition. Literally, Jesus says, “You then…” with an emphasis on “you”. It’s a contrast. *“This is how they pray. But not you. You are to pray like this.”*

The prayer begins with an introduction, words perhaps very familiar but something we would do well not to skip over. Because knowing who we’re praying to changes how and what we pray. Put another way, Jesus calls us to pray. And we are to pray to our heavenly Father.

We are to pray to our heavenly Father. We need to think about this. That alone tells us three things about prayer. First, it is corporate. Second, it is powerful. And, third, it is personal.

I. PRAYER IS CORPORATE

First, note that the first person pronoun here is plural – “*Our* Father”. Prayer is corporate.
A) Not Private

Though no one else can hear your silent prayer, prayer is never private. What do I mean?
 1. Personally concerned

Yes, God is personally concerned for us as individuals – our struggles, burdens, and joys.

2. But not indulgent

But He is not indulgent. He is not going to spoil us as permissive parents would.

B) *But Familial*

Prayer is not private. It is not all about us. It is familial. There are others involved.

1. Family ties

There are family ties. When you become a Christian, it's not just your relationship with God that changes. It's your relationship with all Christians that changes. They are now your siblings.

2. Family concerns

So there are these family ties. And, with that, family concerns. Ours is a shared life in Christ. This is why we are told to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep.

“*Our Father*” means we are a family united in Christ. Prayer is corporate.

Illustration:

That corporate reality, that shared life, is something integral to the Bible. But it can seem radical. For the past 100 years, the Amish have resisted new technological advancements like the television and the automobile. But during the same time they've welcomed modern medicine to treat serious diseases. Why? Jameson Wetmore is an engineer and social researcher and has studied the Amish and their perspective on technology. He commented in an interview ([READ](#)):

The reason the Amish rejected television is because it is a one-way conduit to bring another society into their living rooms. And they want to maintain the society as they have created it. And the automobile as well. As soon as you have a car, your ability to leave your local community becomes significantly easier. You no longer have to rely on your neighbor for eggs when you run out. You can literally take half an hour and run to the store. In a horse and buggy, when you don't have your own chickens, that's a half-day process. I asked one Amish person why they didn't use automobiles. He simply smiled and turned to me and said, "Look what they did to your society." And I asked what do you mean? "Well, do you know your neighbor? Do you know the names of your neighbors?" And, at the time, I had to admit to the fact that I didn't.

Jesus says we are to pray, “*Our Father*” for we are a family united in Him. Prayer is corporate.

Application:

Which is to say our ties to one another in Christ demand our concern for one another. And that should express itself in prayer. This shared relationship brings with it shared burdens and obligations. Yes, our prayers should be for our own needs. That's absolutely clear. But they should go far beyond our own needs. Case in point, in the midst of a cultural crisis or some great calamity, Jesus is saying that we need to be praying not only for ourselves but for each other.

Prayer is corporate. Jesus calls us to pray. And we are to pray to *our Father* in heaven.

II. PRAYER IS POWERFUL

But we see something else here - “*Our Father in heaven.*” Prayer is powerful.

A) *Not about Cosmology*

Now we need to understand this is not a statement about location or cosmology.

1. Not about God's heavens

This is not about the stars, the sun, or the sky. This is not about the heavens of God.

2. But about God's throne

This is about the throne of God. This is not about where He is but who He is.

B) *But about Sovereignty*

“Our Father *in heaven*” is a statement about God’s rule and reign, His sovereignty.

1. His wisdom

It speaks to His wisdom. There is nothing beyond His sight or outside His view. He truly is omniscient. He knows all things and He knows them well. No one can inform Him of anything.

2. His power

So this speaks to His wisdom. And to His power. He knows and does all things well. No one can oppose Him. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all things, the matchless One.

“Our Father *in heaven*” means God is king. Which means prayer is powerful.

Illustration:

Think of it this way. Our prayers are not earthbound. They reach God’s throne room. The escape velocity of Earth is 25,000 mph. That’s the speed NASA has to figure into equations for a rocket to break the pull of earth’s gravity. How does that apply to prayer? Maybe you hadn’t thought of this, but our prayers reach an escape velocity. They are not earthbound.

Application:

What does that mean for prayer? It can give us a real expectancy in prayer. Christian, you already know a guy. You are already in touch with an influencer, someone in the know, someone with some pull. You know the One who made and holds the stars in their orbits, the One who directs the hearts of kings, the One who raised Jesus from the dead. He may call you to do something and to be part of the solution. But don’t overthink this. The first thing is to pray.

Prayer is powerful. Jesus calls us to pray. We are pray to our Father *in heaven*.

III. PRAYER IS PERSONAL

For prayer is corporate. And it is powerful. But there’s something else here and it’s absolutely vital that we see it. Jesus says, “Our *Father* in heaven.” So prayer is also personal.

A) God is Not Abstract

God is not abstract. He is not an idea, a theory, the great other, or a force.

1. Pop culture lessons

Star Wars has its place in our modern mythology and has its lessons – tales of heroism, stories of sacrifice, the reality of good and evil, the temptation of control and power. It’s all there.

2. But it is theologically off

It has its lessons. But it’s theologically off, owing more to Eastern religions than biblical truth.

B) God is Our Father

For the true and living God is not abstract. He is personal and He is our Father.

1. Reflections on a text

(**READ Psalm 103:13-14**) Oh, how He knows us. He knows our needs and comes alongside to provide and protect. He knows our frailties – our sinful rebellious hearts, our willful stubborn streaks. There is relational knowledge here. And deep overflowing paternal compassion for us.

2. Revolutionary approach

What Jesus was saying was quite revolutionary. It was common for God to be described as being like a Father. But He was rarely addressed as Father. Yet this is what Jesus routinely does. And how He teaches us. “Abba” – the Aramaic word used in love for a father, even by a child.

“Our *Father* in heaven” can be as revolutionary for us. Prayer, you see, is personal.

Illustration:

I read that King Charles has hired a man to wake him by playing the bagpipes outside his window each morning. That might be too much for you in the morning, but having a personal piper is a tradition among monarchs and one that Queen Elizabeth II also enjoyed. In fact, the man who now plays for King Charles is the same piper who played at Her Majesty’s funeral.

Now this is a case in which a king has given orders to someone to wake him. But is there ever a case where someone could awaken the king on their own, without any orders at all? And wouldn’t that take some boldness or privilege? How about in the middle of the night? Who could do that? As Tim Keller was fond of saying ([READ](#)), “The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 AM for a glass of water is his child. We have that kind of access.” Think of that.

Application:

Such kindness on His part. That is our confidence as we pray. Think with me. We ask, “*Is He listening?*” Yes, He is. But “*Why is He listening?*” It has nothing to do with how short or long, simple or complex, plain or expansive our prayers may be. So then why does He hear us? Because He loves us. Because we are forever His children. Because He is forever our Father. And nothing can change that. That is all. And that ensures, it guarantees, that God hears us.

Prayer is personal. Jesus calls us to pray. And we are pray to our *Father* in heaven.

CONCLUSION:

As we wrap this up, given that it’s Father’s Day, I want to apply this particularly to the fathers in the room. Fathers, what does all this mean in terms of how we should pray? In no way do I want to shame or condemn anyone here. My hope is that this would encourage you.

First, pray with your children. They need your consistent example. And pray for them. God works through prayer. C. S. Lewis said ([READ](#)), “It may be a mystery why he should allow us to cause real events at all; but it is no odder that he should allow us to cause them by praying than by any other method.” God works through farmers, doctors, soldiers, counselors. And God works through prayer. He will work through your prayer. Are you praying for your children?

Second, what are you praying for them? Don’t stop at prayers for temporal fleeting success. Pray for their hearts, the awakening and deepening of their relationship with Jesus - whatever age they may be. That may come through temporal fleeting success. Or that may come through temporal fleeting failure. This is a journey. What are you praying for them?

Third, how are you praying for them? Pray with expectancy. Pray with faithful boldness.

Jesus calls all of us to pray. To whom do we pray? We pray to our heavenly Father.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus calls us to pray.

(magnet) And we are to pray to our heavenly Father.