

Prayer in the Shorter Catechism (5)

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[0 : 00] take on our lips the words, our Father who is in heaven, what kind of people ought we to be?

If we should take on our lips the words, our Father who is in heaven, what kind of people ought we to be? If we begin our prayers where Jesus began his prayer with the heavenly fatherhood of God, then what kind of Christian will you be? And what kind of thing will you pray for?

Our prayers will never rise beyond our understanding and experience of the heavenly fatherhood of God. Let me say that again because if this is the only practical truth you should take away with you from our studies in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Westminster Shorter Catechism's doctrine of prayer, then I shall consider these studies to be a success. Our prayers will never rise beyond our understanding and experience of the heavenly fatherhood of God.

It should be apparent, should it not, that not only does Jesus teach us to pray saying, our Father who is in heaven, and not only does Jesus model for us what it means to pray, our Father who is in heaven, but Jesus by virtue of his death on the cross for us has secured for us our adoption as sons and daughters of God, thereby enabling us to pray our Father who is in heaven.

Which means that only the Christian can genuinely pray this prayer because only the Christian who trusts in the cross of Christ genuinely has God as his or her heavenly father.

[2 : 03] And yet sometimes I wonder whether we appreciate the radical difference it makes to our prayers, and yes, even to our lives as Christians, that the living God who made heaven and earth, the universe, and all the wonderful things that we see and detect is our Father.

Well, it seems to me that among many other things, if we take on our lips and believe in our hearts that God is our Father who is in heaven, we will be secure, prayerful, honest, content, honest, and bold.

The path to becoming these things in prayer and in life rests in our experience and understanding of the heavenly fatherhood of God.

Let's begin then. The first thing that the heavenly fatherhood of God enables us to be is secure. Be secure. Over the lockdown period, Kathmer and myself watched a box set called Criminal Minds, detailing the work of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit.

The heroes are criminal profilers. They predict the behavior of the people who are committing the crimes. And on the show, all the criminals have this one thing in common.

[3 : 37] They are all insecure. They don't feel loved, and so they take their insecurity out on their helpless victims.

They try to find love in all the wrong places, with the wrong people, and in all the wrong ways, chiefly by assault and murder. I want to suggest to you this evening, that the most important thing to understand and experience is the heavenly fatherhood of God.

But if we should be secure as Christians, and not blown about like a cork on the ocean, then we need to live in the security of knowing that God is our heavenly father.

That is, before virtually anything else, the most important thing for us all to understand and experience as Christians. We do not need to earn God's heavenly fatherhood.

You already are His precious daughter through faith in Jesus Christ, and nothing, and no one, not even yourself, will ever change that.

[4 : 51] Our fathers in Westminster use the phrase of drawing near to God in prayer, that we should draw near as children to a father.

That's the language they use in the catechism. There's the fundamental security of our position in life and prayer, that we relate to God as children to a father.

Thomas Boston was a minister in the Scottish borders in the early 18th century, and he says of this, who can a child expect help of if not of a father?

Who can a child expect help from if not of a father? Will our heavenly father ever turn his face away from us in a mood or a tantrum?

Will he ever say to us, no, I can't help you, I don't have the ability? Not at all. We live and pray in the security of the heavenly fatherhood of God, every one of us.

[5 : 59] Which means that when all else fails, and when everyone else fails, God never will. God asks us people in the Old Testament, can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has born?

And God answers his own question. He says, Take a baby away from her mother, and she'll cry for her mother, because it's only when she's close to her mother, that she can feel secure in her mother's love and care for her.

And the mother reaches for her crying child, and she holds that child close to her heart. And God says that, though our mothers may forget all about us, he never will.

We can rest secure in that. Do you feel secure in the heavenly fatherhood of God tonight? Do you see your fundamental relationship to him as being that of a child to a father?

Well, if not, get back to the basics of the gospel. Out of the cross, where God's son died to make you God's beloved children.

[7 : 29] Be secure. Second, if God is our heavenly father, then we can be prayerful. Prayerful, be prayerful.

Prayer, not just in its quantity, but also in its quality. It's a problem for us, is it not? But then, I don't suppose any of us fully understand or experience for ourselves the heavenly fatherhood of God as much as we might wish we did.

Perhaps there are some among us here this evening who are afraid to pray. Because you've been walking away from God for some time now, you become afraid of his rebukes and his discipline.

Perhaps there are those among us who've just plain stopped praying because we can't see the point of praying anymore. For whatever reason, we'd rather hammer nails into a wall than the church building, do practical things, than get involved in the prayer ministry of the church.

I am convinced that the vast majority of our problems in prayer would disappear if we would truly understand and experience for ourselves the heavenly fatherhood of God.

[8 : 47] To whom is it we bow our knee in prayer? We come to our father whose love for us is so much greater than the love of the father in the story of the prodigal son who ran to embrace his son.

You may have been walking away from God for some time now, but be sure of this, he wants you back. And he is ready to embrace you as the beloved child that you are.

And we come not just to a father, but to a heavenly father whose power for us and in us is greater than the dividing of the Red Sea or the stopping of the sun in its tracks. We may have stopped praying because we can't see the point of it anymore, but be sure of this.

Our heavenly father is still as infinitely powerful as he ever has been, and you can trust him. So if we take on our lips and believe in our hearts the preface to the Lord's prayer, our father who is in heaven, what kind of people ought we to be?

Answer, prayerful. After all, it is our heavenly father to whom we come. Third, be content.

[10 : 11] Be content. Many hundreds of years ago in mid-18th century Haddington in east of Scotland, the town's minister, the Reverend John Brown, was writing catechisms for his parishioners, thereby helping them to understand how to apply the Bible into their day-to-day lives.

And when it came to the question of how the fatherhood of God should impact their lives, John Brown wrote that having God as their father should fill them with, and I quote, contentment with his provisions.

Contentment with his provisions. In other words, as their father, God will provide for his children. And as their heavenly father, he is able to provide royally, bountifully, plentifully for them.

The dictionary tells us that contentment is a state of satisfaction. Having God as our father means that we pray out of our satisfaction with all God has already done and with all God already is.

Having God as our heavenly father fills us with satisfaction because we know he's going to provide for his children. In Matthew 7 and verse 11, Jesus asks us to ponder what it means for us to have God as our father and to rest contented with his provision in our lives.

[11 : 50] Jesus says, if you, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, and we do, do we not give good gifts to our children? How much more will your father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

And so we're coming in prayer to a heavenly father in whom we could not be more satisfied. We're content with what he's given to us. We know that as our father, he loves us and he's able to provide for us and we're content in that.

Do you realize that praying out of a sense of contentment gives great glory to God because no longer are we questioning his care or his ability to care for us.

We're just happy to be called and to live as his children. Be content. The fourth thing knowing God as our father gives us in prayer and in life is be honest.

Be honest. I'm pretty sure that every father among us here wishes we could be better fathers. You know, I certainly do.

[13 : 12] So many failings. One of the areas in which I wish I could be a better dad is in being available for my children. And rather than speak to them and especially speak to them in anger, to listen to them.

To be the kind of father they can be honest about with whatever is going on in their lives. About what makes them happy and about what makes them sad.

About all their relationships and about all their insecurities. About their successes and about their failures. I would consider it to be the greatest of all failures in my life if I felt that I would be the last person in the world my children would be honest with.

We can bear our hearts to God because he is our heavenly father. We can tell him exactly how it is with us. We don't need to pretend with him.

He can see through us anyway. We tell him how things are from our perspective. That's why we cling to the Psalms.

[14 : 25] That's why we don't ever want to let the Psalms go for dear life. Because they are brutally honest about the way we feel. The Psalmist he never hides behind a mask of pretend piety as a smiley happy person.

he is absolutely honest in telling God how hurt he is how betrayed he feels and how he can't see a way out of the problems that he faces.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ one family in him be honest with your heavenly father. Are you bored in your Christian life? Tell him.

Are you guilty? Tell him. Are you fearful of what the future holds for us all? Tell him. Are you tempted?

Tell him. Are you rejoicing? Tell him. Tell him it all in prayer. Hold nothing back from him.

[15 : 31] You will not shock him. You will not surprise him. But by going to him with everything you will please him. because so often is it not true God is the last person to whom we go with these things.

But the heavenly fatherhood of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ means that he can and should be and wants to be the first. The last thing which the fatherhood the heavenly fatherhood of God enables us to be in prayer is to be bold.

To be bold. I do love as many of you do also the words of that hymn thou art coming to a king with thee great petitions bring for his grace and power are such that none can ever ask too much.

But be bold not so much in coming to a king but in coming to a father who is in heaven. What do you think? Do you suppose he shall be displeased with us that we consider him so great that we would pray to him for the conversion of the nations?

And what do you think? That he'll be angry with us for praying for situations that would seem impossible to us a terminal illness a broken relationship or a hundred thousand other things?

[17 : 04] not at all without being brazen without taking him for granted we approach him with boldness. Okay so I want to think tonight the rest of evening think through this of a situation in your life which seems to you so complicated that you cannot see a way out of it.

Think about it in your own time a situation in your life which seems so complicated that you cannot see a way around it. It is oppressive to you to even think about it.

Have you prayed about it? Have you boldly approached your heavenly father? Have you set it all out before him? And you say well I'm afraid to tell him how little faith I have that he will or can do anything about this situation?

And yes I understand only too well how you feel I've been there. But remember who it is to whom we pray your heavenly father and then go laid out all before him with boldness and it is amazing how things will change.

Yes perhaps the situation itself but most definitely your attitude toward it. Our prayers then never rise beyond our understanding and experience of God as our heavenly father.

[18 : 42] I say these things not primarily because the Shorter Catechism teaches them and not even because I can find them in the Bible and not because I've experienced them all for myself but because the Lord Jesus modeled them for us he prayed in these ways secure prayerful content honest and bold and the gospel frees us and empowers us to pray just like him.

So go on then pray like Jesus our father who is in heaven. Amen.