

# Our Father in Heaven

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, church family. Today we're going to read from Matthew chapter 5, and we're reading from verses 7 through to 13.

Jesus is continuing to teach his disciples, teach us, and now he's continuing with prayer. So we're starting at verse 7.

And when you pray, do not keep up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[ 1 : 03 ] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Okay, good morning, everyone. Well, yeah, as Simon introduced, we're going back in to the Sermon on the Mount today.

And next Sunday, we're going to focus in on the Lord's Prayer. I'm going to take us through the first half of the Lord's Prayer, and then David Corder will take us through the second half of the prayer next week.

And then after that, we're going to pick up where the story left off in chapter 8. So we've finished the Sermon on the Mount, so you might be wondering, why are we going back into it? I don't think it's because I didn't do a good enough job when I taught on this passage last time.

The other elders didn't say that anyway, but there's two main reasons that we're going back in to focus on the Lord's Prayer. First and foremost, it's because the elders, we felt that there was just so much substance in the Lord's Prayer that there wasn't enough time to study it properly when we looked at the full context of verses 1 to 18.

And prayer and forgiveness are so crucial to living the Christian life. So it's worth taking some extra time to focus on these things.

[ 2 : 24 ] The second reason is that we hope to, as we go through these two topics in particular, prayer and forgiveness, looking at the whole prayer, we hope to kind of touch down in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to show how the entire message of the Sermon on the Mount fits together.

Often we take this part of the Bible and we just treat it like an encyclopedia, but we're going to see through this topic on prayer and forgiveness that we'll see Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as it is, one single message.

Okay, well, with that preamble, let's get into our passage for today. As we come to the topic of prayer, please have two things in mind. And I hope to help us to be able to use the Lord's Prayer as a guide for our prayers, as a launching point into what to pray for.

I think that's one of the benefits of the Lord's Prayer. It gives us a formula to launch into prayer from. It's a good gift from God in that respect. And the other thing to keep in mind is I'm more interested in our constant attitude of prayerfulness.

Rather than picturing just your morning prayer time, 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us, Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances.

[ 3 : 55 ] It's walking through life and, in a sense, never saying amen. So I'm really thinking of a prayerfulness rather than the activity of a single prayer.

So a prayer, what is it? Well, John Calvin, the great theologian, called prayer the chief exercise of faith. The chief exercise of faith.

Let's just consider for a moment just how much faith has to overcome for us to pray sincerely. Our secular society, in which most of us have grown up, sees the universe, the world, as a closed system of cause and effect.

There is no supernatural realm. And yet, a Christian prays as if God is always present. Not intervening here and there, but always with his hands on the wheel everywhere. It just doesn't come naturally to where we've grown up. Or consider our secular friend's view of adulthood, becoming an adult in terms of being independent.

[ 5 : 10 ] A person to be respected is someone who succeeds by their own grit and their own giftedness. But then a Christian is meant to live with the posture of a child, suckling milk.

Add to these two massive obstacles that we're in an age of instant gratification. And we're in an age where we let our feelings and desires tell us whether to do something or not.

And prayer, let's face it, isn't always exciting and fun. There's a lot of obstacles to praying. No wonder prayer doesn't come naturally to who we once were.

If prayer was simply a spiritual activity, it would just require skill and self-control. But it goes deeper because prayer is the chief exercise of faith.

Nothing quite like prayer expresses our new life in Christ as a child of God. And so I think we should expect the powers of hell would attack us at this nourishing route of living the Christian life.

[ 6 : 30 ] So having said all that, how's your prayer life going? How's your prayerfulness? When I reflect on what stifles my prayerfulness, a lot comes to mind.

I don't know if you can share with me these things. What stifles my prayerfulness is wanting to be independent so that I get the credit. Not thinking prayer is all that useful because I can't see the immediate results.

Not feeling like I need to pray because life is going smoothly at this present moment. Or I pray just to make sure that life keeps going smoothly.

So it's quite, I just get to the point and get on with the rest of my day. Or maybe I'm just overwhelmed with guilt and shame.

I feel so unworthy to talk to God. Or my desire for other things. There's so many things my heart desires that to pray, to spend time with God, I'd just rather be doing something else.

[ 7 : 42 ] Or maybe I fear that my words, my half-hearted desires, my half-hearted attempts won't be acceptable enough to God. Or maybe I fear what others will think of my prayer and evaluating my prayer.

And then there's sometimes I fear that prayer will work. And I'm worried what God will take away from my life to make me more holy.

Maybe it's going to hurt if he answers my prayer. Now, if you can resonate with any of that, with all that swimming around my soul, how can I approach God with confidence?

What reason is strong enough to persuade my heart that I really can approach God? We're going to come back to that question.

But for now, let's not comfort each other and excuse each other by saying we all struggle with praying. Because if prayer is the chief exercise of faith, then it's not just one aspect of the Christian life that we're struggling in.

[ 8 : 51 ] We are struggling in faith. And faith doesn't come from pulling ourselves up from our bootlaces. Faith comes from looking outside ourselves and looking to God and what he has done for us in Jesus.

And no surprise, that is exactly where the Lord's prayer begins. All true prayer begins here. Before any Christian prayer can occur, it's as if God asks us to pause and consider.

Who do you take me for? Who am I to you? Now, I'm borrowing these questions from J.I. Packer. They're good questions. First question we need to answer.

Who do you take me for? Who am I to you? Do you take me as a judge of external performance? Like a judge on Australia's Got Talent. This is the religious person's assumption that we see in verses 5 and 6. That hypocrisy, that actor putting on a mask.

[ 10 : 00 ] If you believe God's law is all about external behaviour, then you're constantly evaluating your worth and your value before God according to your performance, either succeeding or failing.

And often when we think of prayer, we might feel like we're failing. It's viewing God like a manager at work who doesn't really care why you're doing your work so long as you're doing it.

And the more you do, the better. So are we coming to God? Do we picture him as a judge of external performance? That's a religious view of God's law.

And Jesus shows the shallowness of that view of God's law in chapter 5. I think this kind of attitude is often expressed in pompous prayers.

Almighty God and Father, I extol you for your unconditional election. Jesus' substitutionary atonement, imputing his righteousness, your spirit's irresistible core.

[ 11 : 09 ] For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Now, in a sense, there's nothing wrong with those words, so don't get me wrong. But I think a religious view of prayer, the more jargon, the better.

The more we can puff ourselves up, the better. Because we're viewing God as a judge of external performance. So if you view God as a judge, we'll either use prayer to get more righteous credit. With God or we will be so afraid of failing, we just won't step out in faith. We won't exercise our faith. So who do you take me for?

A judge of performance? Or maybe you take me for an automated vending machine. As if God is this impersonal force that just wants the right input and then he will reward you with blessing. This is a worldly view of prayer. It's just about reciting the right words. It's heaping up empty words, Jesus says.

[ 12 : 21 ] Now, a quick clarification. Jesus isn't forbidding repetition. Jesus himself repeats himself, even I'm repeating myself now, in his prayers.

There's nothing wrong with repetition. The problem is using our mouth without engaging our mind and our heart. Speaking to God without thinking.

That's the problem. It could be expressed as our Father in heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Please help me get all HDs in my studies and give me a smooth and happy day.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It is taking God for a robot. Just put the right input in and he will give you blessing.

[ 13 : 23 ] It's even treating prayer like magic. You just need to cast the right spell and poof, there you go. There's the result. And then we often complain.

Prayer doesn't work. I think we can see this in the church through mindless reciting of liturgy. Now, again, there's nothing wrong with liturgy. And our church has a liturgy. It's not written down. But I assure you that there's certain phrases when we pray that we know that the rest of Grace Evangelical Church will go, yes, that's a good phrase.

We have a liturgy. Are we saying it meaningfully or are we just reciting it? So do we take God for a judge or an automated vending machine or do we take him for who he is?

Our father in heaven. Not an impersonal force, but a personal God. Not a judge of external performance, but a loving father who is attentive to our needs, verse 8, ready to provide.

[ 14 : 42 ] He isn't ignorant that you have to tell him what you need. He isn't unwilling that you have to somehow convince him to care. I take you for the God in heaven who has all power at your disposal.

To me, by your mercy, you are my loving father. I know that you only ever give me grace and compassion. When I ask for food, you don't give me a rock or a snake.

You are a good God. You are our father in heaven. Christian prayerfulness overflows from faith in a right view of who God is.

Fatherly care, heavenly power combined. What a combination of who God is. Emma makes me these little Bible verses to pin up on my office wall.

And this is the latest one. Isaiah 57, 15. I'm really enjoying this verse at the moment. For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

[ 15 : 53 ] I dwell in the high and holy place. Does it sound familiar?

Sounds to me like blessed are the poor in spirit. So theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Starting at this point, remembering who God is, remembering who we are in God.

This is why it's a good time to spend some time reflecting on who God is. In our small group, we have a running joke about the preamble to prayer at Grace Evangelical Church.

Most people spend a bit of time putting some theological things in at the start of prayer and then they move on to asking for things. Now, it is possible that that preamble is just putting on a hypocritical act, just trying to say things to impress other people and impress God.

But it also could be a way to reorientate our hearts to remember who God is and who we are in relation to him. Now, please understand me.

[17:15] I don't care if you put a preamble in or not. That's not the point. My main point is that our prayer should all be soaked in and come back to revolve around our understanding of who God is.

At the end of a prayer, we shouldn't be thinking, wow, that's a prayerful person. We should be thinking, wow, God is good. I can trust him. Christian prayer only flows from knowing who we are in the Son of God.

Do you remember chapter 5? Jesus tells us what true righteousness is. It's not merely external but internal.

We see it as he talks through anger and lust and unfaithfulness. And the true righteousness isn't measuring up to the list of rules, but it is sharing the Father's heart of love, being full of truth, not retaliating to evil, but choosing to love those who harm you.

We're called to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Now, with all that in mind, let's return to that question. What ground is strong enough that whatever is swimming around your soul right now or in any moment that is stifling your prayerfulness, what ground is strong enough that you can sincerely and confidently know that the living God is my dad in heaven?

[18:48] Well, let me give you two quotes from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, I didn't come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the rain fell and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.

Our half-hearted feelings, our half-hearted attempts to relate to God, we fear that they're not acceptable enough, but in Jesus, who fulfilled the law for us, who was the only faithful son, in him, faith in him, I am accepted, fully accepted.

I can't add to that acceptance, I can't take away from that acceptance. If I'm feeling unworthy in him, I am justified. I am righteous.

Once an enemy, in the son, I am adopted. To call God father is what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

[20:17] How else would you have the boldness to call God your father? It is in Jesus, in him alone, our only foundation, our only righteousness, that we know God is our father in heaven.

All his heavenly power is working for us, for his fatherly care of us, his adopted children. So that's the first step when praying in prayerfulness, is to bring this to mind.

And the word of God is a great place to bring this to mind. Our father in heaven. So that being so, what is it that you really want most? A vending machine, God, what I want is the gifts that God can give me.

They are the valuable thing. With a judge of performance, I want to use prayer to puff up my sense of righteous credit. Apart from seeing God as our father through Christ, I think John Stott helps us to see what our prayerfulness actually looks like in God's eyes when it's bent in on ourselves.

When we get our view of God wrong, it twists those first few petitions in the Lord's Prayer. When we get God's identity wrong and who we are, suddenly what I want is my own little name, my reputation to be defended and made much of in the world.

[21:52] It would be, I want my power to be effective, to make my own little sphere of influence grow. It would be my own desires, my own will to be established and getting upset when my way is frustrated.

But if we remember who we are, who God is, our divine father, suddenly, well, not suddenly, over time, our hearts, desires and ambitions turn away from self and towards him.

Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. There will, what do you want? What do you really want? Our heart's desire will be directed towards him.

What we really want is more life. And when we remember that our life is found in the sun, all of blessing is found in Jesus, then what I want is more of God to lift himself up and to fill up my heart and to fill up the world because that is the source of life.

Hallowed be your name. I want your name lifted up everywhere, starting in my own heart. You're not treasured like you should be. Hallowed be your name.

[23:10] Your kingdom come. I want your good rule to take over my heart. I want your good rule to come finally. Make this world full of peace and justice.

I want your will to be done. I want to be convinced from my heart that your ways are best and joyfully do what you say. And in my circumstances in the world, I want your will to conquer.

Your ways are best. Let's just slow down and take a quick look at each of these. Hallowed be your name. The children's talk really helped us to understand what this means.

This isn't part of the address to God. So our father in heaven, hallowed be your name. This is the start of what we're asking for. Hallowed be.

It's a request. It's a prayer. Hallowed means to respect, to honour, to make holy. But God already is holy.

[ 24 : 15 ] So it's asking for God to lift up his name. And it's not just a prayer against people using God's name as a curse word. A person's name represents the whole person, their character, what they've done.

God, make who you are the highest place in every heart in all the world. That's where you belong. Tim Keller helps us to understand the depths of this prayer.

He says, hallowed God's name. It's not merely to live righteous lives, but to have a heart of grateful joy toward God. And even more, a wondrous sense of his beauty.

We do not revere his name unless he captivates us with wonderment for him. So as I pray for my little boy, Samuel, I want him to be safe.

I want him to be healthy. I want him to be happy. But my deepest desire for him is that he comes to see and treasure and live for Jesus.

[ 25 : 24 ] What am I praying for there? What am I praying for there? I'm praying that God's name would be lifted up in Sam's heart. Or as you pray for our nation, Lord, use this time where what the world thinks will give them life is being stripped away.

Use it to reveal that true life is found in your son. Help people or cause people to repent and come to you for life. What are we praying for? That God's name would be lifted up and treasured and trusted.

That he would have a rightful place. When you, Father, are lifted up, I see more of you. And if you are my treasure, that's what I want.

Secondly, your kingdom come. Again, Jesus is sitting on his throne. He is ruling.

He is the king. But to pray for his rule to deepen and extend is for people to embrace that rule gladly. Have you ever noticed how things can just dominate your desires and your thinking and just take control of your life?

[ 26 : 38 ] Praying your kingdom come is firstly praying, Lord Jesus, rule over my thoughts. You direct them. Rule over my desires.

You tell me what to desire. Rule over my commitments. Rule over my emotions. How do we see this?

When we're praying for a brother or sister who's caught in sin, Lord, your kingdom come. Break in with your grace and free them from the illusion of life being found where they won't find it.

But convince their heart that your way will give them life. Your kingdom come. Your rule. Take control of their heart.

It's praying that the church has witnessed through our daily attitudes and be like salt and light that others would see and join us in glorifying God. So for Jesus' rule to be embraced, we're starting with ourselves.

[ 27 : 43 ] And then we want that to be embraced by more people. And we want that rule to be all over the world. I'm not content with my sinful heart.

I'm not content in this world. My soul hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Come, Lord Jesus. Your kingdom come in my heart.

Your kingdom come fully. Come back. Once you're ruling, that's when blessing will flow. And the third prayer. Your name be lifted up.

Have the rightful place. When you are treasured, your rule will be embraced. And so your will be done joyfully. Again, God's will at one level is already being done.

He uses the worst evil to achieve his eternal good ends. His will is being done in heaven and on earth. But at another level, have you noticed how hard it is to pray this prayer with integrity?

[ 28 : 50 ] I want comfort. I want comfort. I want comfort. I want health. I want harmony. I want success. I want it now. And I want it done in my way.

To then pray, your will be done. It challenges my will. The degree to which we can pray this with integrity, what you will, when you will, how you will, depends on how much we trust that God is our good father.

Often, this prayer is going to provoke repentance as we pray this because we will see that our will is just at odds with what God's will is.

Here's how Martin Luther put it, what this prayer is praying. Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering and adversity and to recognise that in this, your divine will is crucifying our will.

I want to add to that, not just crucifying, but resurrecting our will to joyfully, trustingly choose to go God's way.

[ 30 : 17 ] It's trusting like a four-year-old who doesn't quite understand what their parents are doing all the time. They may not understand, but it doesn't stop them from trusting and running into their parents' arms.

So in heaven, God's name is always lifted up. He is always worshipped. Because he is lifted up in heaven, his good rule is fully embraced.

And so his will is joyfully done. And so as a child of God, what we want most is for heaven, what's happening in heaven to be happening on earth more and more.

In our own heart, in our church, and then filling up the world. So that's this prayer. David's going to take us through the second half next week.

But let me just make a few comments on the second half. It's not as if we need to not be selfish and pray for what God wants first and then we pray for ourselves.

[ 31 : 22 ] But if we believe that his kingdom and his righteousness is where life is truly found in the son, then that interprets what my needs are.

If I need to have faith in order to live for him, I can come to him with all my needs, expecting him to be ready to give.

I need his provision. I need his forgiveness. I need his protection. I need his protection. I need his protection. This first half of the prayer reshapes what our needs actually are.

And we can come to him knowing he's ready to provide. So hopefully that helps us know what we're praying for, what we should be praying for.

And I know that praying this doesn't come automatically. In fact, God has given us prayer so that as we pray this, these desires would become ours more and more.

[ 32 : 23 ] So don't wait to pray until you feel this. God is telling us pray like this and then you'll start to desire it. But having said all this, you might have a lingering doubt, a lingering question in your mind.

Not because you don't believe God's word, but because you do. The question rises out of verse 8. If our father knows what we need before we ask him, why do we need to pray?

What's the point of prayer? He doesn't need our prayers. And God often graciously provides for us without us asking.

So why pray? Pray. I think we can find the answer when we look at Jesus' life and his praying life. He prays when he's faced with hardship. He gives thanks to the father again and again. When he's making big decisions, his prayerfulness is just scattered throughout his life.

[ 33 : 26 ] And I've always wondered with Jesus' life, was he just pretending to pray, to give us an example to follow? Because if prayer is spreading out our helplessness before the Lord, the son of God, did he really need help?

Or was his prayer life just part of his human nature? But think for a sec about John chapter 5.

Let me read a few verses from John chapter 5. There, in John 5, the Jewish leaders are wanting to kill him. And here's why. For this reason, they, the Jewish leaders, tried all the more to kill him.

Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

Do you hear what privilege it is to call God father? Jesus gave them this answer.

[ 34 : 37 ] Very truly, I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his father doing, because whatever the father does, the son also does.

For the father loves the son and shows him all he does. Now, there's a lot of amazing statements in that short little passage, but I find perhaps the most amazing, the son can do nothing by himself.

He doesn't want to do anything by himself. He doesn't want to be independent. He wants to be filled with his father and what he is doing.

I don't think prayer is just part of our weak humanity as dependent creatures. It is that. We are dependent creatures. I think prayer is part of the divine, eternal son of God relating to the father,

what he's always been doing.

He's always been receiving from the father. Prayer is to enter into the childlike relationship of the son of God with the father.

[ 35 : 58 ] Calling God our father is outrageous unless it's true that Jesus really is the son of God.

And unless it's true, we really have, by his mercy, been brought into his life. Prayer is the son's glad dependency on the father.

Prayer is learning to be prayerful, to be conformed to what God desires.

Prayer is becoming the children of God that we now are in the son of God. Becoming more like Jesus, who is glad to be dependent on the father for all things.

Transforming our desires to align to the father and joining the father in his mission to give his eternal life to rebellious and imprisoned hearts.

[ 37 : 01 ] That's what prayer does. It's entering into the relationship between father, son in the joy of the spirit. Let me finish with a quote from Calvin, John Calvin.

Christians pray in order that they may arouse themselves to seek him. That they may exercise their faith in meditating on his promises.

That they may relieve themselves from their anxieties by pouring them into his bosom. In a word, that they may declare that from him alone they hope and expect, both for themselves and for others, all good things.

That's what a child does with their father. So church family, let's keep exercising our faith by becoming the children of God that we are in Jesus.

Will you pray with me as we finish? Let's pray. Father, thank you for your mercy.

[ 38 : 11 ] We were cut off from you rightfully because of our wayward hearts. And yet, by your mercy, you have brought us into the life of the son of God who fulfilled the law on our behalf.

Who died the death so that we could be brought into your family. Father, I pray that that deep identity of who you are and who we are in Jesus would take root in our hearts more and more.

And that that would overflow in prayerfulness. Lord, make us prayerful. Individually and as a church, because that will honour you as our good father in heaven.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.