

Pray then like this

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[0 : 0 0] Hi everyone, I'm Linda. For those who don't know me, I'm going to read from Matthew chapter 6 from verses 5 to 15. And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And when you pray, do not heap 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. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[1 : 1 4] For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

For if you do not know me, my name is Sam, and I am filling in for our regular preacher Dave Bott this morning.

As Adam mentioned, this is week two of our holiday series, Big Prayers for a New Year. Last week, Bo took us through Psalm 90, in which Moses looks back on a life of challenge.

Today, we're going to be looking ahead, looking ahead to the new year and asking the question, what is our most urgent need? What do we need to attend to first in 2025?

So, we moved house toward the end of last year, and in almost every room, we have pictures on the wall, things in their place, things put away, all except for two rooms.

[2 : 3 3] The garage and the shed, and they have urgent need written all over them. I was in our shed this morning, and there's barely any floor space left, so that's quite urgent.

As a family, we have a change of weekly routine this year, which will need some practical wisdom and God's grace in our lives to be patient with each other, to love each other, and to show each other grace.

As a church, we have needs too, don't we? Staffing, relationships, care for one another, ongoing mission to the community that was started with the carols night, maintenance, car parking, and I'm sure for ourselves and for our friends and our families, we could think of lots of needs too.

So, lots of needs, lots of plans, but what's most urgent according to Jesus? That's our main task. That's our main task today.

And take it from me, the answer is a little surprising. So, let's pray for God's help to hear that answer this morning. Let's pray. Our Father, we ask for help this morning.

- [3 : 59] We ask for help to hear this answer. We ask for minds that are keen and hearts that are hungry to hear you speak to us. We pray this in Jesus' name.
- Amen. So, in your bulletin, there's a quick map of where we're going. And the prayer that Jesus teaches us consists of an address, followed by six petitions or six requests.
- The first three petitions are big, bold, eternal petitions for eternity, and then the next three are petitions for each day. So, you'll see there's point one.
- Point one will be the address, our Father in heaven in verse nine. Point two will be petitions for eternity. And point three will be petitions for each day. Most of our time is going to be spent in verse nine.
- So, if we get to the end of verse nine and you're wondering, am I going to get out of here by 3 p.m.? Don't worry. I'm about to hop down. We're almost done. So, we're going to spend most of our time in verse nine.
- [5 : 09] Before the prayer begins, Jesus gives an instruction that you'll see in verse eight. Oh, sorry, beginning of verse nine. He says to pray like this.
- If I'm teaching Geordie some new skill to catch a ball or to ride a bike, I might say to her, do it like this, and then model what it is I'm teaching her after I've said that.
- So, if I'm teaching her to catch a ball, I might say, do it like this, and then say to her, hold out your hands in front of you, watch the ball, and watch it into your hands. So, Jesus is doing a similar sort of thing here.
- He's modelling to us how to pray. He's supplying a pattern from which our own prayers can be modelled. So, he hasn't put things together randomly.
- He's put things together deliberately. The first things, then, are the things we need to ask for first, the things we need before anything else. We'll get to the first request, but before we get there is the address, and Jesus chooses these words carefully too.
- [6 : 25] We're going to consider them, consider the address, because it's the basis for all of the subsequent requests. So, we'll spend half our time in the address, the first point in your bulletin.
- Who do we address when we pray? Why this title, Father, and not another? This question might seem too basic for us this morning, but let's just pursue it for a moment and see what we can find.
- Some titles for God use picture language, and in Exodus 15, where we spent a bit of time last year, Moses calls God a warrior, as in a fighter.
- Does that mean God is a warrior? No, it just means that during the Exodus, God was acting like a warrior. It's a picture or metaphor that points us further back to something deeper about who God is, that he leads, protects, and fights for his people.
- So, when we address God as Father, we do so because he is one. He's not merely acting like one.
- [7 : 44] He's not merely like one. It's not just picture language. We address God as Father because he is one.
- And this wonderful truth that God is a father comes to us not because we're clever enough to work it out, but because the Son shows it to us.
- John 1.18, No one has ever seen God. That's John speaking of the Father. Pretty absolute.
- But God, the one and only, who is at the Father's side, that's John speaking of the Son, has made him known.

The Son makes him known. And the Son shows us there is a deeper, more essential truth about God than this. In John 17, skipping toward the end of the book of John, 17.24, Jesus is praying alone to the Father before his crucifixion.

[8 : 55] And in that moment, he prays for us on this basis. Because you loved me before the foundation of the world. For all eternity, there was a Father loving his Son.

This truth doesn't point us back to something else. This is it. Not all of us have had the best earthly examples of fatherhood.

I have, and I'm very grateful for that. But if your idea of fatherhood is tainted because of an abusive or distant earthly example, realise your experience is not the template.

That's the template messed up. That's the piece of music played badly. Because God is Father. He's the template to all earthly fathers.

The piece of music to be played. Not the other way around. All human fathers are supposed to reflect him. And isn't it a wonderful thing when our kids learn from their fathers some aspect of what God is like?

[10 : 12] Isn't that a great thing? But wonderful news. God is Father. But he's not everybody. He's not everyone's Father.

Matthew 11, 27 says, No one knows the Father except the Son. He's not everyone's Father. He's the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just for a moment, imagine you're taking a walk around your neighbourhood in the cool of the evening, walking the streets, and you come across an amazing garden, sprawling green lawns and massive shade trees.

It all looks very inviting. And so you decide to trespass and walk toward the house. The house is beautiful. It's well kept.

The lights are on. It's winter. Smoke's coming from the chimney. And there's dinner smells wafting. And you glance through the window into this warm family home.

But that's it. That's as far as you can go. So that's us without Jesus. Looking in from the outside, seeing this home is like seeing God the Father.

[11 : 33] But he's not ours by birth. And we have no right at all to be in his home, let alone in his garden. At this point, we're only looking in from the outside.

All right. We're up to 1B. So our Father in heaven. So Jesus, who is God's eternal, beloved son, tells his followers, those who trust him and love him, to address God as our Father.

Jesus may well have just said, you and me, we're brothers now. My Father is your Father. So you can call him our Father.

Galatians 4, 5 to 6 says, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

We pray our Father, because we have received adoption as sons. We now share in Jesus' life that he has had with the Father for eternity.

[12 : 53] When Jesus says, our Father, we're not just looking in from the outside now. We're inside. And so, now to prayer.

As Adam alluded to, the answer to our reluctance, our coldness, our struggle, is not to first try harder, although we do have to try.

The first thing is to breathe in this gospel, our Father, and then breathe out prayer to our Father in heaven. Compare the address with how we're not to pray in verse 5 to 7.

Have a little skim read, and what do you notice? Lots of words to impress and gain favour of men and God.

How much does this contrast with the address, our Father in heaven? We already have all the acceptance and favour of the Father that he has for his own eternal son, because he's our Father.

- [14 : 05] We need not pray to impress or be accepted. In verse 5 to 7, when I read it first, I thought, those hypocrites mentioned they're miles off where we are, but I think there's something to take heed of too, because that's something we can fall into, praying to him, or praying or speaking to impress or gain favour.

But the answer to that is the same as well. Breathe in the good news, our Father, then breathe out prayer in private and in public. While we're in the context, check out verse 8.

If you're following the bulletin, we're up to the subheading He Knows, So Ask. Verse 8 says, Don't be like them, the hypocrites, for God knows what you need before you ask.

God knows He's omniscient. He knows everything. How then do you expect verse 9 to begin? God knows everything, so you don't need to pray.

God's got it covered, so we can just get back to what we were doing. Verse 9 begins, Pray then. God knows what you need, so ask Him.

- [15 : 34] God's sovereign, so pray. He knows, so ask. God's omniscience is never an excuse not to pray, it's actually an incentive here.

If you've come hoping for an explanation this morning, I can't give you one, but I've found it helpful this week, thinking about this, to remember my identity in Christ.

Listen to Romans 8, 17. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, heirs of the world to come with Christ.

Colossians 3, 1. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand.

Where's Christ? Seated at the right hand. Where are we? With Him. Where He is. Now I think I've actually given you two things that I can't explain.

- [16 : 44] But put them together, and they have helped me a little bit as I've thought about why I can sometimes excuse my lack of prayer with the fact that God knows everything.

And I think one of the reasons I do this is because I forget the privileged place that I occupy in God's plans. I'm not always praying from the identity that God has given me.

God has made us His sons and fellow heirs. We're with Him who is seated at the right hand of God. In Jesus we have a telephone line, if you will, into the throne room.

Our prayers are a means by which God works out His plans here on earth. So grab hold of who we are in Christ, pray aright as Jesus tells us and God will graciously work out His purposes in me and through our prayers.

He knows, so ask. The last point about the address is He's our Father in heaven, not far away from us, but far above us in greatness.

- [18 : 02] have you had an experience and a frustrating experience on a phone call where maybe to a help desk and you've spent five minutes explaining your situation only to find out that they didn't have the authority, the knowledge to help you?

Or the opposite experience where you've been pleasantly surprised because the person has had more authority and knowledge than you're expecting and they were able to solve what it is you were calling about.

Our Father is in heaven, far above us in authority and greatness, ruling the universe.

Are our prayers big enough? Do we ask enough? Next week, if I think the plan is still the same, Adam will take us through a passage in which Paul tells us to intercede or pray for all people, not just the people we know, but for all people.

Thankfully, Jesus knows we need help and so the next three requests or petitions provide a model for big, bold prayer that Jesus is calling us to.

- [19 : 27] So prayers for eternity as a second point on your handout says. So remember Jesus is modelling prayer, like teaching a new skill to a child, and the first things are what we need to do first.

So from verse 9b, hallowed be your name. What we need most is for God's name to be hallowed. Let's just unpack it a bit.

Hallow is not a word we use very often. I think the only other time we use it is for Halloween. But hallow means to make holy or consider holy. So we could say considered holy be your name.

The second bit to tell someone your name is to make yourself known because names have meaning in the Bible. So putting these two things together we might say hallowed be your name means make yourself known so that you are considered holy.

Make yourself known so that you're considered holy. holy. The first petition, the thing we need most according to Jesus is that God would make himself known and would be considered holy.

- [20 : 44] This has surprised me because I mean in lots of ways it's not even about me. Does that start to surprise you?

Maybe invert things a little bit for you? I think that's Jesus' intention here. But holiness, what is holiness?

What does it mean to consider that God is holy? It can be a hard concept to put into words like what exactly are we revering about God? Or perhaps if we're honest and not saying this is a blanket thing, perhaps something that's maybe not all that attractive to us and therefore something we don't want to ask for, something that suggests indifference, maybe distance and aloofness, or even maybe pettiness or mean-spiritedness.

holiness. So, holiness. There's a decisive moment where God's holiness is demonstrated in the Old Testament.

And we're going to go back to the book of Exodus. It's fairly recent for us. And the moment we're going back to is the crossing of the sea. And remember this whole thing is really a one-sided arm wrestle.

- [22 : 15] So, like an arm wrestle between a dad and a young son, where the dad is just drawing out the arm wrestle, that is until the son grows up and the son gets just as big of muscles as dad.

It's a one-sided arm wrestle. And God's drawing out the confrontation with Pharaoh so that God will be known. The arm wrestle ends and all Israel has crossed the sea.

And they've reached dry ground. They get to the other side and they look back on the Egyptian army dead on the seashore.

It's finished. Then Moses and all Israel sang. Pause for a moment and imagine, put yourself there. Relief, a lot of shock, and then as the shock subsides and things sink in, a sense of jaw-dropping awe about who this God is because of what he's done for them.

In the middle of this song they sing, it goes, who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

- [23 : 42] Moses is reaching for words and he really can't get higher than this, majestic in holiness.

So what has Moses witnessed that leads him to this conclusion, majestic in holiness? Moses has seen two things, he's seen judgment but he's seen rescue, rescue through that judgment.

And Moses has just witnessed this awesome but terrible judgment through which Israel was rescued and in it he sees God's holiness shining brightly.

What does a holy God do with evil? What would a holy father do with persistent rebellion that seeks to take his place and replace his fatherly care with oppression, abuse and slavery?

Rule that can just murder a generation of infants. What does a holy God do would a holy father allow this to continue indefinitely?

[25 : 00] After much patience on God's part, when it fell, the judgment on Pharaoh and his army was fierce. Fierce because while he graciously delayed when it fell, it fell and fell quickly.

It was pure because God in his holiness could not continue to overlook such evil. God Moses sees God's holiness in judgment.

I think our average person today might struggle to sing with Moses. I think I might struggle because we don't like a God that judges, though we're actually happy to judge ourselves.

Listen to this quote, God's anger must rise from that love. Thus his anger is holy, set apart from our temper tantrums.

It's how he in love reacts to evil. Far from aloofness, mean-spiritedness, God's holiness in judgment is good and right. But there's more.

[26 : 14] Moses' conclusion, majestic in holiness, was not just because of judgment. God's holiness shines in their rescue too. Remember what initiated the rescue?

God is described as hearing their groaning and then he remembered the covenant that he had made with them. And all that follows is a picture of what love from a holy father to people he has committed himself to looks like.

It's fierce because he protects, leads and even gets in the fire with them. It's pure because he doesn't overlook their suffering.

Ultimately though, Exodus is a book that points forward. In the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, here we see completed what the Exodus only promises.

In the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, we see the same two things. We see judgment and rescue. In judgment, God as a holy father cannot overlook sin.

[27 : 26] As God, the son, bears the sin of his people on the cross, the father's judgment is fierce and pure. The cross leaves us in no doubt that God is holy.

Like Exodus, this one act was rescue as well, in which his holiness shines. Because rather than pour out his anger on the guilty, he turns it inwards.

The son willingly takes our place, dies and is raised by the spirit. spirit. All this is what love looks like from a holy God.

Fierce. Jesus' body was bloodied for us. Pure. He didn't overlook sin. And complete. He was judged, righteous by the father and his body was raised by the spirit.

For us. God's holiness for what it is.

[28 : 35] With nothing to fear. It's good, it's right, it's just, and it's lovely. Let me read this one more quote.

There's nothing grubby or abusive about the love of this God. God's love of God. Thus he is holy. My love is naturally all perverse and misdirected, but his love is set apart from mine in perfection.

Incidentally, the holiness of God's love for us is what keeps us till the end. John 17 verse 11, if you'd like to look that up this afternoon.

So pray then like this. Our most urgent need in 2025, according to Jesus, is for God to make himself known that we would consider him holy, that we would know him as our holy father.

father. This is also not just our most urgent need this year, but it's the boldest prayer we can pray, because it's not just a request for us, it's a request for the whole earth, one way or another, to be filled with this knowledge of God.

[29 : 52] One of the minor prophets, Habakkuk, gives a glimpse of where history is headed. So Habakkuk 2.14, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge and glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

So to pray this prayer, hallowed be your name, is to pray with the grain of history. That's where history is headed. I'll cover the rest very quickly.

We've got to the end of verse 9. That's about all we're going to do today, but I'm going to cover the rest of the Lord's prayer, that he teaches us quickly in a prayer that we can echo in our own minds if we want.

But before we do that, I'd just like to draw your attention to point 3, prayers for each day. That is requests for bread, forgiveness and protection. Things we need each day.

Our Father is in heaven, so we pray boldly, but we also keep our feet on the ground asking and knowing that we need these basics each day.

[31 : 04] By way of encouragement, God uses ordinary people like us with basic needs for bread, protection and forgiveness to pray these big, bold, eternal prayers of verse 9 to 10 that will usher in the world to come.

So to finish, find prayer a struggle, breathe in the good news. Jesus teaches us to pray our Father. In 2025, let's keep our feet on the ground, but pray big, bold, eternity-shaped prayer to our Father in heaven.

Alright, let's pray to finish. Our Father in heaven, your rule and reign is perfect and good.

We ask then that your kingdom come. We ask for the Lord Jesus, our King, our Judge and brother, to return.

Today we see opposition to your kingdom in the world and struggle in us. We ask that soon your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[32 : 20] with no struggle in us and no opposition in the world against it. In our church, I pray that you would transform us so that we would know your will and delight in it.

Father, give us what we need to live for our bodies and minds to work. We'll be wise and put money aside by trusting you to supply our needs each day in 2025.

forgive us as we forgive others. Like sheep, we can't rely on ourselves to stay out of situations that will lead us to sin and danger.

So guide us, shepherd us, and give us good friends. Lead us to green pasture. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.