

Learning Prayer

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[0 : 00] Familiarity breeds contempt. This is a concept that says that when we are so close to someone or something, we lose respect for them or we don't have the appropriate awe that we should.

I was reading about famous celebrities recently whose kids just knew them as mum or dad. And some of them could never understand the fascination with their parents.

I remember reading about Michael Jackson and his son just couldn't understand why people wanted to come and get a photo with his dad. His dad was just dad.

Why would you want to get a photo with him? But then years later they would have a realisation, a shock. Oh, dad is someone famous. I think this is true for many parts of our lives.

There's things we have and things we see every day and they become normalised and we don't realise how amazing they are. We're currently in a series on prayer and we've seen that the world is crying out for an experience of God.

[1 : 15] Prayer is a global phenomenon and people all across the world want to talk to a God who listens and responds. Because in all of us there is that nagging feeling that there is more to this life.

And so people go chasing for spiritual experiences because we crave more than this life. People go up mountains, they cross the world, seeking and never finding.

What if the way to experience and talk to this God was right in front of us? But we had become so familiar with it that we've just discarded it.

I'm talking about the Lord's Prayer, of course, which Debbie just read for us. It is such a classic and simple prayer. It's easy for a child to pray. It's pervasive.

It's set at weddings and funerals. It's in movies. But is it possible that we don't really even look at it anymore? Our eyes just glance over it looking for something more spiritual, something deeper.

[2 : 26] For Christians, there is a longing to draw closer to the God of this universe who shows us His love through His Son. A longing to come before our Father, to pour our hearts out to Him and to know that He listens and responds and loves us.

But is it possible that the Lord's Prayer has become so familiar with it that we've discarded it? Maybe not from our lips, but maybe from our hearts.

Today, we are going to stop and we're going to take a few moments to look at the words of this prayer. It was a prayer that was taught to the disciples by Jesus and if it was good enough for them, it is more than good enough for us too.

We're going to be learning how to pray, how to talk to God, and we don't want to forget the very things that Jesus taught us to do. So today, we're going to walk through the Lord's Prayer, maybe like the celebrity's children, there'll be a moment of shock and recognition for us as we see this prayer anew.

My prayer is that it will encourage us to pray. And I'm hoping and praying that it draws us to talk with God as He is, as a Father, and come before Him.

[3 : 46] So as we have a look at this prayer, it's only appropriate that we do indeed pray. So let's pray. God, we thank You that You are our Heavenly Father and we thank You for the privilege it is that we can come and talk to You as Father.

Be with us this morning as we look at this wonderful prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. Help us to reconsider what it means for us and help us to use it to talk to You and draw closer to You, Lord. Amen. And so the context of this prayer is that Jesus is teaching His disciples to pray, not like the pagans who babble on and on and on, and not like the Pharisees, who are the hypocrites who get their reward by praying out in open.

And the prayer starts in a completely radical way. The great and awesome and majestic and all-powerful God of the heavens, the one who created the world and sustains it, who knows every living being, who placed the stars across the sky, knows how many pieces of hair is in this very room, we get to call Him Father, our Father in heaven.

This is the God who couldn't be approached by the priests in the Old Testament without blood of a sacrifice so that they wouldn't die.

[5 : 16] And Jesus teaches us to call this God Father. Father, it's not just the position of authority in a family, it is also one of intimacy. And so we're called to call God Father.

It is an incredible privilege that Jesus tells us to call God Father. But the flip side of this is we can become too familiar with God.

As a heavenly Father, we can forget the awesomeness of God, just like with those celebrity kids. Now, the only reason that we can indeed call Him Father and not tremble guilty before Him as one who is guilty before a judge is because we pray in Jesus' name.

Jesus, the Father's Son, the one who was raised to God's right hand, He is now intervening for us. He's saying, these ones, these ones I've adopted into my family, these ones, even these ones in Chatswood, I have died for them.

These ones come into our family. The only reason that we can call God Father is because we approach Him in Jesus' name.

[6 : 34] That's why when we often finish praying, we say, in Jesus' name, Amen. It's not some kind of magic formula that makes God have to hear us.

It's because of the finished work of Jesus. Jesus, we are adopted into God's family. How else could we approach God other than by being adopted into His family?

And so this prayer, this first line of the prayer, sets us up for the whole prayer. It recalls God's position as Father. It reminds us of the Son's work in salvation, and so we come adopted into His family with the rights of a son.

We could be coming to God as a harsh judge who may listen to us, who may give us mercy and forgiveness, but the God that Jesus reveals is not like that.

He is a loving Father who delights to hear the rest of our prayers because we're one of His kids. We're part of the family. And so if we were to look at nothing else, if we were to pray nothing else, if we were just to dwell on this one line of the Lord's Prayer, it would begin to implant in our hearts a comforting trust of God.

[7 : 59] That the God that Jesus reveals to be our Father, He is not distant, but He is close to us. When we are struggling, when we can pray nothing else in our lives, when we are crying out to God, sit on this one line, that God is our Father, and that because of His grace and love for us, we can indeed come before Him.

And so we have this introductory first line, our Father in Heaven. And after that, we have our first request, that God's name would be hallowed.

It's a strange word. The only other time I can think of it is in one of the Harry Potter books. It's a strange word, but it just effectively means holy.

This is not a prayer for God's name to be holy or special. God's name already is holy. But this is a request that we recognize who God is.

That He is a Father that we only come to as children, and we want Him to be seen for who He is. We want Him to be seen as holy.

[9 : 14] And so hallowed be your name is a request. It's a request that we would make God seen to be holy. May my words and actions show you, God, that you are holy.

As a Christian, I'm a bearer. We are bearers of God's name. We are carriers of His name.

Christians. God, keep me from dishonoring your name.

Praying this places us in a position where we're not desiring that our names would be famous, but that God's name would. It shows a heart that is captivated by God's awesomeness and a desire for others to see Him.

It's not a desire that people would see how great I am. It's not that, you know, James Barnett, that name, that person, he's great. No, no, no. It's that God's name would be great.

But we don't always hallow God's name. It's more than taking God's name in vain. It's even more than blaming God. But it's far worse when we forget who He is.

[10 : 25] It's the lack of gratefulness and gratitude that springs from a selfish heart. And so to hallow God's name as this second request prays of us is not just to show that God is good and holy, but to have a heart that is full of joy and gratitude towards Him.

And so far in these two first lines of the Lord's Prayer, we come to God as a Father, grateful to Him, and then we request that God's kingdom would come.

Now, God is, of course, ruling right now. He is ruling in His kingdom. This is not a request that God would come, as if He isn't ruling now, but it's a request that God's kingdom would come into our lives and into the rest of the world.

This prayer is one of lordship. God, I want you to be the Lord of my life. You are a loving Father because of your son I'm adopted into your family.

And so this part of the prayer asks that we would live as one of His kids in His family. It's a prayer that God would extend His lordship over all of our lives.

[11 : 43] It's a yearning that God would have lordship over every part of our lives so fully that we'd want to obey Him with all of our hearts and with all of our minds and with our bodies with joy.

Because we are made to serve God. We are made to serve Him with our bodies, with our hearts, with our desires, with our spirit. But we can choose to let God's kingdom reign in our lives.

We can let Him partially reign in our lives. It would be like someone that appears to be a model citizen. I'm going to pick on Dan because Dan's in front of me and because he's reporting to me now as a U13er.

So, you know, I think that's okay. Is that okay, Dan? Let's say Dan is a model citizen of Australia.

Upstanding citizen. What does an upstanding citizen do? He always follows the road rules.

He never speeds. He never risks a parking fine. He's always back to his car early. So he looks like a model citizen, always paying his tax on time.

[12 : 50] Have you ever paid tax, Dan? You probably will this year. Do you remember what that was like? So he appears to be a model citizen. But at home, he flaunts the rules.

You know, there's other people's mail that comes to his house and he's always opening it up, which is illegal, it turns out. He's illegally downloading videos and movies out of impatience for them to be released here.

He's making counterfeit money on the side. He'll pay tax out of that, I'm sure. It appears that he's a very good citizen of Australia, but secretly, he's just out to make his own patch a little better at the expense of everyone else.

It's not that hard to imagine for us. We all have those nooks and crannies, those parts of our lives that we don't want other people to look into.

Parts of our lives that either fill us with pride so we don't want to hand that over to God, or maybe it brings us shame. And so we don't want the light of day to be shone on it.

[14 : 01] But this part of the prayer calls for God's kingdom to come into all of our life. Our actions, our words, our feelings, our desires, even our secret desires.

And we can only do that, we can only bring this prayer to God because he is, as that first line said, he is an approachable father. But that's not the only aspect to God's kingdom coming.

We want to see God's lordship extend over our lives, but also across the world. To see the whole world know the love that we have as God's children.

It truly is a wondrous gift. It's not one that's diminished when we share it, but it instead grows from us out to the rest of the world.

It was Isaac's birthday during the week, and it's always interesting watching other kids on one of the kids' birthdays. If you've got more than one kid, you would know what this is like.

[15 : 08] Because our other two, well, one of them in particular, felt like they were missing out. You know, one has all of these presents. Where is my present?

They feel like they're missing out because presents can't be shared on a birthday. But that's not the gift of the gospel. It actually grows as we share it.

We don't, you know, want to need to hold on to it because it will be stolen by someone else. This gift that God has given us to be brought into his family grows and extends as we share it.

We don't need to be selfish with this gift. So as we start, we pray to an approachable, awesome, and holy Father. We want to place ourselves into his family under his rules with his kingdom extending over our lives and we want to see this kingdom spread out.

And so being in God's kingdom means that we will then pray your will be done. Jesus teaches the disciples and us this final part of the prayer that orients us to God.

[16 : 21] These opening parts of the prayer are all about us and God. We've reminded ourselves that God, he's the Father, he's awesome, his kingdom should be over our lives and the whole world and now Jesus says to ask for God's help to do his will and not our will.

This is incredibly hard. because I like doing my will. I'm sure it's true for all of us. If you've ever tried to choose a movie to watch or a place to go and eat with a group of people, you will know how hard it is when everyone wants their will to be known above others.

the only way to pray this prayer your will be done with any meaning is if we remember the one we are praying to.

And there'll be a quote on the screen from Tim Keller. He says, unless we are profoundly certain God is our Father, we will never be able to say thy will be done.

Unless we are profoundly certain God is a Father, we will never be able to say thy will be done. Otherwise, God is just going to be some kind of impersonal cloud forcing us to obey Him out of some mysterious will or nefarious plot.

[17 : 47] Like a child submitting to a parent out of fear of punishment, we'll only obey this distant God until we can flee. But a child will submit out of love and trust and they'll continue to come back if the parent is a loving Father, if our God is a loving Father.

If we can't say your will be done from the depths of our heart, we will never know peace. We will always be trying to enforce our will onto the world and the people around us.

But that is beyond us. Only God has that kind of control and that's why we submit to Him. These first petitions bring us before God as a Father who is awesome, whose kingdom we want to spread across our lives and it's all about God.

It's a God centered prayer. It protects our hearts from self centeredness. Otherwise, when we pray, we would just start by praying for the things that we want and that list could be unlimited.

And so Jesus has taught us in this first half of the way to pray that it's about recognizing that God is our true food, He is our wealth, He is our happiness, and now recognizing who our God is and what He has done for us, now we bring our list of prayers to God.

[19 : 28] But this is in light of who He is, it's a new frame of heart. And so we pray, give us today our daily bread. It's a prayer for necessity, it's not a prayer for luxury.

Bread was a staple, much like rice is for many cultures, it's not fancy, it's basic, it's a way of asking God for our basic needs.

The early church father, Augustine, thought that this prayer was a smaller part of a prayer from Proverbs 30 verse 8. Let me read, it's a request of God, keep falsehood and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread, otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say, who is the Lord?

Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God. It's a prayer with such a recognition of our failures, that we are weak if we have a little, and we are weak if we have a lot. God, only give me as much as I can handle. Have any of us prayed like that before? Can any of us actually say we've limited how much we've requested of God?

[20 : 50] God? I'm sure my prayers and our usual prayers are more God, please bless me, bless me more and more, money's tough, fix that problem, bless me financially please.

But this is a prayer that is such a reminder of what we already have. That we have everything. We've been adopted into God's family, we have God himself.

what do we need more zeros in our bank statement for, for however many years we have left on earth? Because ultimately we don't need status and comfort here.

We need God as our Lord and Father. And so we move from requesting the basic things that we need and we move to requesting relationships.

Firstly, with God, and then with others. Forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors. To request that our debts from God would be forgiven.

[22 : 00] This is still mind boggling for me. To actually say to God, you should forgive me. You should forget all the times I've wronged you. We can only do that because of the one that we are in debt to.

Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is the only way to approach God as a father and for us to have the audacity, the shamelessness to say, God, please forgive me.

Forget all the times I've wronged you. Please forget all the times I will wrong you. This brings an amazing freedom. And yet we can find it difficult to come before God and to confess because that means we need to admit that we've done something wrong to someone outside of us, that we can't cope on our own, we can't be good enough on our own.

No one likes that feeling of being wrong, no one likes that feeling of admitting to someone else that we have been wrong and yet this prayer embraces it.

God, I have wronged you. I am the one to blame. I am the one who has broken this relationship with you, God, and yet you offer to forgive me.

[23 : 28] Martin Luther said that if we find confession difficult, the heart is not right with God and cannot draw confidence from his gospel. If we find confession difficult, the heart is not right with God and we cannot draw confidence from his gospel.

Confession should bring confidence and joy because it sends us back to our need for God's grace, the very heart of the Christian faith.

And here, Jesus rightly links our relationship with God with our relationship with other people. forgive us our debts as we forgive those who we are indebted to.

And so if we have seen our sin and God's radical forgiveness of us, we will be able to forgive others. God reconciles and heals our relationship with him, but he does that with people too.

Our God is one who reconciles and heals relationships. He heals us and makes us able to forgive and reconcile with others, to be a community that is treasuring Jesus together.

[24 : 44] But if we haven't fully understood our sin and the gift of grace and sought forgiveness from God, we are not going to be able to forgive others.

not even that, maybe we won't even see the need to forgive other people. Wouldn't it be a terrible shame if people were to describe us as people who held grudges?

I'm not sure if you know someone who holds grudges or whether that's been said of you, he always holds grudges. That guy, he just doesn't forgive anything. Imagine if God held grudges against us. And yet our self righteous hearts and the hardness of hearts gets in the way of understanding what God has given to us and the forgiveness he offers.

And it stops us from holding out that love to others. Our Father is a God who heals relationships with us and him and us and other people between one another.

[25 : 53] Praying this prayer, pushes us to go and seek forgiveness from others. To forgive others in light of God's radical forgiveness.

We've prayed so far to God requesting bread, asking God help me depend upon you for all things. We've prayed, Father forgive me when I don't depend on you.

and now we pray lead us not into temptation, deliver us from the evil one. This prayer is acknowledgement of all that is in between, that life is one of temptation and responses to it.

The Bible tells us that God will test us to craft us into his people, burning off our selfishness to reveal humility, burning off ignorance to reveal knowledge of God.

But this is a prayer that we would not walk into temptation, that we would not actively entertain sin. From one side comes the temptation of riches and power that makes us forget God and our need for him.

[27 : 15] The opposite is a temptation of poverty and thinking that God is not there, he is not listening. The other way is temptation of the flesh that says what my body craves is better than what God wants for me.

This prayer asks that we would walk a narrow line between all of these. That we would walk close to him, turning the eyes of our hearts away from these temptations and drawing closer to him.

And when we've moved through all of the steps of this prayer, it indeed helps us to do so. So we pray to an amazingly loving, approachable father who is awesome and holy.

We want to place ourselves in his family to be spreading his kingdom in the knowledge that he provides all that is necessary, especially forgiveness and relationship with others.

Jesus so that we can then walk his way. Jesus didn't teach this to be a formula for us. It is a wonderful prayer, but it's not that we should just say these words and think job done, tick.

[28 : 34] More than that, it contains a structure, a pattern for us, which is really helpful to bring before God. Martin Luther described praying through the Lord's prayer is riffing on the Lord's prayer.

To take the words, it's like a musician like the Andy, playing around on a chord, moving around, to take the words of the Lord's prayer and to pray around them, to riff on the Lord's prayer.

And so even something simple like praying for our daily bread, well this is a prayer that says thank you God that I have a job, so that I have money, so I can go to the shop and buy bread.

Thank you for our society that has farmers and produces wheat to make bread and that these shops can be open when I need it.

It is a prayer that thanks God for all of these conditions that can sustain us and cares for us. This stands in contrast to the way we might ordinarily pray, the way we might default to prayer.

[29 : 50] Often our prayers can just be completely made up on the spot. Maybe it's not reflecting the God who is revealed in the word to be, but our prayer just comes from our needs and who we are.

We can get carried away with what we think we need and forget what we already have. If left to ourselves, we'll just pray what comes into our mind and then we'll get distracted with what comes into our mind.

If we take the structure of the Lord's prayer and riff on it, maybe say the line and then pray based upon that, it forces us to use the full language of prayer, of confession, of praise, of request.

Praying the Lord's prayer requests that the gospel would be moved forward. It pushes us to accept from God what he chooses to confess even when we don't want to.

Praying the Lord's prayer like this forces us to look for things and to thank God and praise him in good times and in bad times.

[31 : 04] It presses us to repent and seek forgiveness during prosperity and success. It disciplines us to keep every part of our lives and to give every part of our lives to God.

It combines the warmth and comfort of praying to a God who is a father with passionate pleas for our desperate needs.

I think this prayer is like a really full meal that has vegetables that are good for building up the function of the brain and the body. It's got protein for muscles.

It's got carbohydrate for energy. And it's a good meal that has all of these in the right amounts. Can anybody think of a good meal like this? Anybody? Sorry?

What's a good meal that's got all of these in good parts? I've heard someone say a Big Mac and I want to slap that person on the wrist.

[32 : 06] The sugar to carb content to protein vegetable is way out. I like to think of like a nice roast because my family comes from England and the Sunday roast you've got some kind of meat, you've got green vegetables, you've got maybe some kind of white potato carb or sweet potato or pumpkin, that kind of thing.

I also see wonderful different types of hot pot that do this. It's veggies, it's meat, it's carbs, it's balanced. But sometimes, I think that's what a good prayer should be like.

It's not just one type of prayer, it's a full prayer. But sometimes we pray like fast food. It's the, whoever said that, the Big Mac of prayer.

You know, we're tired, we're busy, we don't really care about what we're praying, and so we quickly grab that Big Mac and it's gone in three seconds. It doesn't cost us much, but it gives us even less. It doesn't satisfy the body and it just leaves you feeling hungry, maybe a little bit sick. It's okay to have fast food occasionally, but imagine if it was just Big Macs.

[33 : 25] I'm pretty sure there's a movie made about this where a guy only ate fast food. Imagine what it would do to your health. It would be terrible if we just prayed fast food prayers, focused on us.

Our spiritual health would be terrible. If it was just, I'm too busy, I don't have time to pray a full prayer, I'm just going to quickly fire something up. Our prayer, our relationship with God will be shallow.

Our prayer life would be unsatisfying and it would leave us wanting more. We wonder why we don't have healthy relationships with God, but look at what we are putting into our prayer lives.

Don't forget the awesomeness of the Lord's prayer out of familiarity. Pray the Lord's prayer because it is a full meal that will sustain our souls and bring us into relationship with God closer.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you that we have the joy of calling you Father and that we have this wonderful full meal of a prayer from your son Jesus.

[34 : 49] God, help us not to forget what this prayer is out of familiarity. But Lord, we ask that we would use this prayer not just as a structure, not just as words to say, but as a way to remember who you are and what you have done and all of the wonderful gifts that you give to us every day.

Father, help us to constantly be reminded of who you are and the fact that we can bring our requests and our desires to you and that you love us and that you listen to us and you respond.

God, it will not be easy starting to pray. Lord, we need to learn how to pray. give us the encouragement and the comfort to challenge one another, to be talking about our prayer lives with one another, that it would not just be a secret thing, but it would be a thing we do as family as we seek to know you and to draw closer to you, Lord.

We ask this in your son's name. Amen. As Nick said, I'll be at Pishon Cafe this Wednesday morning at 7 a.m. if you would like to join me to continue learning how to pray.