

Text – Matthew 6:9-13

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.

Title – The Privilege of Praying to a Father

Introduction (250)

Hook

How do you approach a great person?

How do you approach a person who has authority over you?

How do you approach a person who has the right to take all of your possessions?

A person who has the right of life or death over you?

How do you approach God?

With a gift? With eloquent words? With flattery? With penance?

With sacrifice? With a plea of mercy?

There are some in the past who believed their god required them to bring extensive gifts, to mutilate themselves, to cut and harm themselves and even to sacrifice their own children to them. All in order to approach their god.

But not so with the God of the universe. Here we learn that our God, the real God, the creator of all things is not like that.

He tells us that we have the privilege to pray to him as a father.

The greatest being, the one with the most authority in the world, who has given you everything you own and has a right to take it back, The one who has the right of life and death over you, invites you to come to him as child comes to a father.

Outline

This will be our focus to this morning. The fact that we have the privilege of praying to a Father.

To do that we will be looking at the Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6. This will be the first of three Sundays looking at the lord's prayer. Today we focus on the privilege of praying to a father.

First we will look at the general intention and structure of the Lord's prayer. Why did Jesus share this with his disciples and what is the general thrust of the Prayer? This is first section I have called The Pattern of Prayer

Second we will remind ourselves of some general thoughts about prayer

Thirdly we will dig into the opening sentence of the Prayer and unravel some of the intention behind Jesus starting his prayer with "Our Father in Heaven".

So today we will look at

The Pattern of Prayer

The Priority of Prayer

The Person of Prayer

So let us begin with our first section, looking at the Pattern of Prayer

Part 1 (1000) – The Pattern of Prayer

Exposition

Context of Giving the Lord's Prayer

As most of you know, The Lord's prayer is found in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount. At this time Jesus has just begun his public ministry. He has called some of his disciples and he is starting to gain fame and a large public following. People are drawn mainly because he is healing the sick but also because of his teachings.

We are told that "great crowds followed him" and so he goes up to a mountain, sits down and starts to teach them. Chapters 5,6 and 7 of Matthew are a record of this great sermon. The sermon is a master piece, with it's main emphasis on how a follower of Jesus is to act.

And in his teaching, Jesus comes to the topic of prayer. He begins discussing the topic of prayer in verse 5 of chapter 6.

In verses 5-8 Jesus explains what not to do when praying.

We are not pray to be seen by men.

We are not to pray to gain the praise and recognition of men.

Also, we are not to pray with meaningless repetitions. We are not to think that longer and louder prayers will somehow gain God's favour.

And so after explaining what not to do, He shows how we are to pray. He gives us a model of prayer, a pattern of prayer.

This pattern is what we know as the Lord's prayer.

Outline of the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's prayer is recorded for us in Matthew 6 verse 9-13.

The prayer is short, about 70 words, and succinct, but incredibly comprehensive.

It is simple enough that a child can understand and easily memorize it, as many of us have.

However, as you start digging deeper into the meaning of the prayer you will find there are depths that even a mature believer cannot fully comprehend.

This is no ordinary prayer. This is given by our Lord himself to instruct us how to pray.

There are many different ways to outline or divide the prayer. The key thing to note and to keep in mind is that the whole prayer is God centred. It is all about God and his Glory. And even the supplications about man's needs emphasise God's providence and our dependence on Him.

So first we have the invocation: *Our father in Heaven*.

Then the second section we see three petitions for God's Glory (v9b-10)

1. *hallowed be your name.*
2. *Your kingdom come,*
3. *your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

And then thirdly we see three petitions for Man's needs. But as mentioned before these are needs as defined by God, which show God's provision, protection and pardon.

1. *Give us this day our daily bread,*
2. *and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*
3. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

For our study today, we will focus our attention on the invocation, And God willing we will study the first three petitions next week and the last three petitions the following week.

Pattern, not liturgy

With the outline of the prayer in our minds it is important to note that Jesus meant this as a pattern for us to use. This is a guide to help us, not a liturgy to recite. It is a skeleton of a prayer which needs

fleshing out with our own words. There is no special power in this specific arrangement of words which somehow opens the blessings of heaven.

How can we be sure of this?

Well for one Jesus is teaching his disciples "How to pray". He is not teaching a specific prayer.

Secondly, He tells them, "Pray then, like this". That is "in the following manner. "Not Pray this"

And finally, the idea of repeating this set of words endlessly contradicts Jesus's clear teaching v7 that he does not want meaningless repetitions. There is no indication these words are to be repeated endlessly in a way to please God.

Jesus is teaching his disciples a pattern to follow in their own words.

Now there is nothing wrong in memorizing or reciting it, in the same way you would recite and memorize other passages of scripture.

In fact memorizing it is a great thing. With it memorized you can use it as it was intended: As a template or a pattern to structure your own prayers.

Application

Possible to please God in our prayers

One thing to note from this Pattern of Prayer, is that here Jesus gives us a guide to a prayer which is pleasing to God. God not only wants our worship, He wants correct worship. He does not just want us to pray, He wants us to pray in a certain way.

And so we can be confident that our prayers are pleasing to God when we follow this pattern. This pattern is not a formula to gain favour, but a pattern which is pleasing to Him. And so we can rejoice that we can communicate with the King of kings in a way we know is pleasing and honouring to Him.

Skeleton to flesh out with our own words

And so we must take this pattern and make it our own. Jesus intends us, as his followers to use this prayer and elaborate on each section. We are expected to take these sturdy bones and put flesh on them with our own words. Words form our heart which talk to these matters.

Prayer can be one of the hardest spiritual disciplines. It is difficult because we often do not have a plan, we don't know where to start, we don't know what to say. We don't know what topics are appropriate.

And fair enough, when we realise we are talking to the King of the universe!

But here we have a template, and outline, a pattern you can use. To use when you pray in your own devotional times.

God want to hear your own words, not a formalized, mechanical, rote prayer. Take heart that your prayer does not have to be a polished manuscript. The attitude and content of your prayer is what matters, not the eloquence or cleverness of the prayer. Jesus teaches that what pleases God is a prayer from the heart following a simple pattern.

Part 2 (1000) – Priority of Prayer

Exposition

Having looked at the Pattern of Prayer given by our Lord, let us take a few moments to remind ourselves about prayer generally before we take a close look at the first section of the Lord's prayer.

In this second section, the Priority of Prayer, Let us just remind ourselves the command to pray, the motive for praying and the effectiveness of prayer.

Command to Prayer

Most of you will be familiar that we are commanded to pray. But this is not a legalistic tick boxing exercise. Praying should characterize every believer in Christ because of our renewed relationship with God. This is an expected and normal part of the Christian life.

Even just notice above the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:5, Jesus says **when** you pray, not if you pray. Jesus expects his followers to be praying. It is not a matter of if, but of when.

In Philippians 4:6 Paul exhorts the Philippians to make their request's know to God. He says:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In everything, Paul instructs them to pray to God.

Similarly, in I Thessalonians 5, in Paul's rapid fire of commands to the Thessalonians he instructs them to *Pray without ceasing* in verse 17. That is their life is to be characterized by praying to their God.

Motive to Pray

We are commanded and expected to pray, but there is a right and a wrong motive for prayer. There is no emphasis on the location, time of day, or posture but God cares about our motive of prayer.

Throughout scripture we find a range of motives which are good and pleasing to God

God honouring motives include:

- Desire to Bring God glory
- Desire to Fellowship with Him
- Desire to show dependence on Him
- Plea for deliverance in trouble
- Expressing of thankfulness

- Confession of sins
- Desire to see salvation of others
- Desire for spiritual growth for self and others.

These are some of the things which are the right motivations of prayer. But it is all too easy to be motivated to pray by motives. Motives such as:

- to make ourselves sound spiritual,
- To impress other with our eloquence and knowledge
- To tick the box of our religious routine
- To gain favours with God.

And I am sure you can think of many more wrong motives for prayer. Our heart is quick to take any opportunity to promote ourselves instead of Glorifying God. Prayer is about glorifying God and our motive for praying must also be to Glorify God.

Prayer is effective

So we have thought about the command and the motive to pray. The last thing I want to remind us about prayer is that praying is effective. Prayer is not empty words or a religious ritual. Prayer is not a psychological experienced that makes us feel better.

Prayer is one of the means of Grace God uses to grow his people to holiness and to advance his purposes here on earth. Through prayer we receive mercy and find grace for our sanctification, and strength for our work which is before us. This is achieved in part through prayer.

Hebrews 4:16 says

“Let us the with confidence draw near to the throne of grace,(prayer) that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

And in James 5:16 we read – *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

When a righteous person prays, when they are united with Christ, when they are filled with the Holy Spirit, when they have submitted to Jesus as Lord, their prayer will have great power.

Their prayer will have great power because their prayer will align itself with the will and purposes of God.

Not only does the bible teach this, there are also many examples in the Bible of this happening.

- Think of the servant of Abraham who prayed for a wife for Isaac, and lo and behold Rebekah appeared at the well
- Think of Jacob who prayed and his brother Esau forgives him despite 20 year of revenge brewing
- Think of Hannah who prayed for a child, and she was given a son Samuel
- Think of the King Hezekiah and Isiah who prayed and 85,000 Assyrians were slain the next day
- Think of Elijah who prayed and there were three years of drought. He prayed again and the rain came.

There are many other examples, but the key is that the prayer of a righteous person is effective.

Application

Do you pray?

So with all that said about prayer, let me just pause before we look at the Lords Prayer more closely.

First off do you pray? Is this something you do as part of your daily devotional time? Is prayer built into your everyday routine in the same way eating and sleeping is? Or do you treat prayer like a PLB device? You only activate when you are in desperate danger and you have exhausted your own resources?

But not only that, is your life characterized by prayer? As the highs and lows of life hit you is your automatic response that of prayer?

When you get a promotion at work, what is your first response? A pat on the back or thankfulness towards God? When your car breaks down or your computer freezes what is your first response? To get angry and annoyed or to pray to God to recognise that he has a purpose in all things?

It is easy to let our prayer life fall off the radar amid our busy routine. It is even easier to let the circumstance of life distract us from praying instead of driving us to prayer. As Christians our life should be characterized by prayer. As Christians our lives must be characterized by prayer.

What motivates you to pray?

I hope and I trust that most of you here do indeed spend regular time in prayer, but then next question then is what motivates your prayer? Why do you do it? Do you do it because you feel you should or out of a desire to fellowship with God? Do you pray because you want to gain the favour of God or to show your dependence in God?

This is especially key when we pray in public, say at a prayer meeting or at a bible study.

What are your thoughts before you start praying?

Are you motivated by what others will think of you as you pray. Are you praying for the praise of others and to put your theological knowledge on display? As you pray, do you hope that people will affirm your words and recognise your prayer?

Now, only you can judge your motive. It is good and right to pray theologically accurate prayers and to use what we learn to inform prayers. It is also good to agree and affirm the prayer of others. Only you and God knows your motive. You will know what motivates you.

But remember it is better to remain silent than to pray for the approval of men.

But even better, is to address the motive and then pray to Glorify God and the edification of others.

Part 3 (1500) – Person to Whom we Pray

Exposition and Application

So, we have seen that the Lords prayer is a pattern for us to follow, and we have reminded ourselves of the priority of prayer in our lives. Which brings us finally to looking at the prayer itself. Which brings us to our third section: The person to whom we pray

We want to unravel what Jesus is getting at when he says this. “*Our Father in Heaven*”. It is a loaded sentence, and we want to unpack it as best we can.

Not all can call God Father

First off, consider who can genuinely call the God of the universe Father? Can anyone call God Father?

Certainly not! Not all people can call God their Father. God is the father only of those who are in Christ! Those who have been born again. Those who have been regenerated through the spirit. Those who are in Christ. Think of John 1:12:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name He gave the right to become children of God

Now you could stretch the term, and rightly point out that God is the Father of unbelievers in the sense that He is their creator. But that is purely limited to creator. There is no relational or paternal associations. And certainly not in a spiritual sense. Spiritually, Jesus makes it clear that they are children of Satan. (John 8:44)

So immediately when we pray “father” we are reminded of the mission of Jesus to restore people to a right relationship with God. We are reminded that there was a day when we could not call God

father. We are reminded that there are many people who cannot call God father. We are reminded that only through God's grace He chose to include us into his family. Included into his family not just as friends, but fully part of the family.

We are reminded that God adopted us. We are legally part of His family and there is nothing which can change that. Because we are in Christ we are his children and He is our father. Eph 1:5 highlights this:

- He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will

Not just to be pardoned, or to become acquaintance, or to be friends, but adoption into his family with the rights of a son or daughter.

So that is the first thing we must remember with this opening sentence. God is our Father only because of the work of Jesus.

So before we move on, I need to ask you: Is God your father? Are you able to pray "*Our father in Heaven*" and know you are truly part of his family? That you are indeed one of his sons? One of His daughters? Are you convinced that God is indeed your Father?

If God is not your Father, there is only one alternative. You are an enemy of God. Your sin makes you a criminal in the sight of God. And God will see justice done and will see you sin punished. If you do nothing, you will ultimately be punished in Hell for your sin.

But God does not want you to spend eternity in Hell. Even as a criminal, even as His enemy, He loved you and made a way to save you from hell.

When Jesus died, he paid the penalty your sin deserved. If you trust in the fact that Jesus paid for your sins, God promises that your criminal record will be wiped clean and that you will be welcomed into heaven as his son or as his daughter. You will have the right to

call him father. The key is for you to trust that Jesus has paid for your sins.

God can be your father if you trust in Jesus. Keep pondering that as we think further of addressing God as our father

Balance of tenderness and Majesty

The second aspect we can draw from this opening line is our attitude as we approach God in prayer.

Generally speaking, there can be two extremes of approaching God. On the one side you can have a cold, formal, impersonal, fearful and overly lofty approach.

But on the other extreme there can be an irreverent, overly familiar, buddy-buddy approach to the throne of God.

Both of these extremes are unbiblical and therefore not what God wants from us. And thankfully, the pattern Jesus gives us provides a balance on our attitude of approach to God.

First off, He is our Father. This portrays a warmth and an approachability in the relationship. A father wants his children to come near and speak to him. It removes any notion of crippling or controlling fear. A father wants to know your needs no matter how small. He is tender, merciful and full of love.

So yes he is father, But he is our father **in Heaven**. He is not like us, he is not of this world, He is majestic, he transcends us. So it is right that we approach with a spirit of devotion and humble reverence. There is No place for thinking we are God's equal in our prayer to Him. He is infinite in greatness. He is in Heaven.

So which side of the balance do you tend to? fearful formality or flippant familiarity?

If you tend towards a fearful formality, bear in mind that he is your father. He sees and pays close attention to what you say. It is ok to

be real and personal with him. He wants to hear your prayers as a father hears from a child.

But if you tend towards a flippant familiarity, don't forget that He is in Heaven. He is not your buddy. He is majestic and glorious and humble reverence is required when you approach his throne.

Reminder that we are pilgrims on this earth

A third thing we can draw from this opening line is that we are pilgrims on this earth. Our father is in heaven. Our home is in heaven. Our place is by our fathers side.

This is a vital thing to keep in mind when we start praying. This world is not our home. Yes we have work to do here, but our ultimate fulfilment and sense of belonging will never come from this earth. The things we pray about must be directed by that reality.

Do we pray more that our friend would have a good job or that they would grow in their sanctification? Do we pray more for the health of our loved ones or for their holiness and purity? Do we pray more that our children would be excel in school or that they would come to a saving faith in Jesus?

It is easy to get caught up with the pressures of our life before us. And it is good to pray for those things, as we will see later in the prayer. But having an eternal perspective as we live on this earth is so vital. In this phrase we are reminded of that "our father in heaven".

No room for selfishness - He is Our father

The fourth thing we can draw from this opening line of the prayer is that He is **our** father, not **My** father. It is inclusive in nature. It removes all selfishness and self-centredness from the prayer. Yes he is your father, but he is also the father of every other Christian.

Here Jesus wants to highlight the unity which must reside amongst the people of God. This is true for all the people of God but specifically applied within the local church.

Within the local church, we are a family. He is our father. We are his children. The church is our spiritual family with God as our father. And it is good and right to treat each other as such.

How important is it to a father that his children get along? When the children are young this is a major learning point. You must get along with your siblings. You must learn to share. You must learn to look out for them. And put their needs before your own.

How much more so with our heavenly father. We are his adopted children and we are to act as members of one family.

So when you pray, do you treat your church family as if they were members of your own family? Do your prayer revolve around those you are closest to or do you consider and include even those who you know less and are different from yourself?

Conclusion (250)

Much more could be said about God being our Father in Heaven and how that directs our prayers

He is the Father of glory, He is the Father of Mercies, He is the Father of Love, He is the Father who knows and Rewards, He is the Father who keeps and protects, He is the Father who is Holy and righteous, He is the Father who is trustworthy.

As we close off this study of God's word let us continue to ponder what a privilege it is to pray to a father.

Let me leave you with a final thought. Our Father in Heaven is not like our earthly fathers.

Some of us had good loving fathers, but some of us had horrible fathers, but none of us had a perfect earthly father.

We have the privilege of praying to a father who will never desert or forsake us.

To a father who will never abuse us.

A father who is compassionate and always available.

A father who has clear and consistent boundaries.

A father who exercises perfect discipline.

A father who is never manipulative.

A father who is always welcoming

We have the privilege of praying to a father who has unconditional love towards his children.

So when you pray, remember that you are addressing Our father in Heaven.

Prepare for the Table

With that closing though let us turn our attention to the Lord's table. What we have before us is the family meal. God, as we have learned is our father. He is at the head of the table and we, as his adopted children, have the privilege to come around and take this meal together.

But remember that you have no right to come to the table of your own merit. You used to be an enemy of the family, guilty of crimes against the father.

But your crimes against the father have been paid for. You have been forgiven. You have been adopted into the family.

As we prepare to eat of the bread and drink of the juice we remember the great cost it took for us to be welcomed to the family. We remember that the only son of the father had to suffer and die,

in order that we can call God Father. We remember Jesus body broken for us and we remember Jesus' blood spilt for us.

Let us now rise and sing before we take part in this family meal

After Song

Now we have the joy to take part of the Lord's supper together.

These emblems are only for believers. If you trust that Jesus has paid for your sins and have please take, eat and drink, if not please let the emblems pass. But if you would like to know more about how to be welcomed to the family table, please come talk to me after the service.

Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for^[f] you. Do this in remembrance of me."^[g]

[Break the bread]

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[Pour the cup]

I'll invite the ushers to help pass the emblems

[After everyone has the cups and bread]

Let us Eat and Drink together

[Pause for 20 seconds]

[Close in prayer]

[Benediction]

Ephesians 1:17-20

23 Peace be to the brothers,[a] and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.