

THE PRAYER OF CONNECTION

Sterling UMC
February 6, 2011
Matthew 6:5-15

The Lord's Prayer. Most of you have known the Lord's Prayer, those famous 66 words, for many, many years. Maybe when you were a child you memorized it in Sunday school. We recite it every Sunday in our worship service. You can pray it even without thinking about it. Without even pausing to ponder the profound truth these words Jesus taught us express and teach us.

Well over the next five weeks I hope to change that. How? I'm going to tear the prayer apart piece by piece. You see actually, The Lord's Prayer is five prayers. It's five different phrases. And each of those phrases, if you look at them in detail, if you understand what Jesus is trying to teach us and you don't just pray it; you live it – it will change your life.

Today we want to look at just the very first phrase, we find it in Matthew 6:9 *“Jesus said, ‘This is how you should pray,’ Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”*

Have you heard about the little kid who got it all wrong? He bowed his head and said, “Our Father in heaven, Harold be your name.” He thought God's name was Harold. Another little boy didn't understand this and he thought it was “Our Father in heaven, how do I know your name?”

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” That simple phrase is one of the most radical ideas ever expressed by Jesus Christ or anybody else. It doesn't seem too radical to you because we talk about God as our Father all the time now. But realize that for thousands of years, nobody called God Father. No! In fact, in the Old Testament, God is called Father only seven times. Jesus exploded all the stereotypes about God when He said, Here's how you talk to God: Father, Daddy, Papa. Father. An intimate term. And Jesus exploded the stereotype and said God is not an angry tyrant, God is not an apathetic creator who just winds up the world and lets it go. God is not some impersonal power. In fact, Jesus said God is a Father not a force.

This is really good news when you understand it. I can't relate to some impersonal force. I can't relate to some disembodied, ooey-gooley-spirit of the sky. But I can relate to a personality. I can get to know him. I can connect. I can have a relationship with God as Father.

There's only one problem. For many people the word “father” is a negative term. For many people the word “father” brings up all kinds of bad memories. Bad connotations, hurts, difficulties, problems, experiences. A lot of people say, “Our Father, who art in heaven?” If God's like my father, no thanks God.

For a lot of people their only idea of father is “You just wait until your father gets home!” And they think of God in that same way.

The truth is human fathers can make home a hell on earth. Human fathers can be capricious, they can be fickle, they can be moody, they can be abusive, they can be domineering and controlling and angry and demanding and selfish and self centered and vicious and violent and aloof. So when we say, “Our Father in heaven” a lot of times we carry baggage in with that word. The reason why many people never connect with God because they unconsciously think God is like their earthly father. We transfer all those mixed up hurts and emotions onto God. We impose them on God and it’s no wonder we have a hard time connecting with God.

For instance, if you grew up with an unreasonable father, you’re going to tend to think God is unreasonable. If you grew up with an unreliable father, you’re going to tend to think God is unreliable. If you grew up with an unconcerned father, you’re going to tend to think God is distant and detached. If you grew up with an unpleaseable father – and this is a real big one – you’re going to tend to think God is unpleaseable. In America, 24 million children live in a home without a father. What kind of image are they getting of God?

So today, as we start this look into the Lord’s Prayer, we’re going to start with two words: our Father. What is God really like? What kind of Father is God?

My goal today is that you would trade in all your misconceptions about God for the truth. My prayer is that you when you really know God as Father it’s going to make a difference. Maybe you’ll connect to Him today like you’ve never done before. So what kind of Father is God? The Bible says four things.

1. He is a caring father.

God loves you more than you will ever know. In fact, God loves you more than you will ever understand. You don’t have a brain big enough to understand how much God loves you. It would be like an ant trying to understand you. You can say, “Yes, I know He loves me.” But you don’t really know. Because you don’t have the capacity to understand how wide and broad and deep God’s love for you really is.

Have you ever found yourself in the midst of a difficult situation and you call out to God and you say, “God, Don’t You care?” I’ve asked it thousands of times. Something goes wrong in my life and I go, Hey God! Don’t You care? Can’t You see what’s going on here? Don’t You care? It’s one of the most profound questions of life. Does God really care about what goes on in my life?

Fortunately, God has given us the answer to that question over and over and over in the Bible. The answer is a resounding, “Absolutely, I care! I am a caring Father. I care about everything in your life.” He has the ability to care about every detail of your life

plus the details of everybody else's life. That's hard to understand but He's God and you're not.

Does God care about your job? Yes. Does God care about your bills? Yes. Your house payment? Yes. Does God care about your dating life? Yes. Your grades? Yes. Does God care about your success or your failure in your career? Absolutely. Is there anything that God doesn't care about in your life? No. Not one thing. Because God cares about every single area of your life. He knows every detail and He cares. What kind of Father is God? He's a caring Father.

2. God is a consistent Father.

That's really important. Especially when everything's changing around us. He is a consistent Father. He will never let you down. He can be counted on. He is dependable. He is reliable. He is worthy of trust. James 1:17 says it like this, *"Every good and perfect gift is from the Father who does not change like shifting shadows."* God is always unchanging.

Our human fathers can be fickle. They can be unpredictable. The good news about God is He's never moody. He never has a bad day. He never wakes up in the morning feeling bad, thinking, "Who am I going to zap today?" That is not what God is like. He is always the same.

The greatest news about this is God is consistent even when I am inconsistent. He is faithful even when I'm not faithful. While everything else in this world changes there is one thing that will never change. God always acts in the same way towards us. He always acts with care. He always acts with consistency and with love. He always keeps his promises. There is a consistency and faithfulness to God's love that you can't find anywhere else. He's a consistent Father.

There's a third thing about God. When Jesus said "Our Father," what kind of a father was he praying to?

3. He is a close Father

The Bible makes this very clear that He's not distant. He's nearby when you need Him. He's available. He's accessible. Acts 17 says this talking about God's closeness, *"God did this [in other words, all the things he's done in history] so people would reach out for Him and find Him since He is not far from each of us."*

Let me share with you three encouraging truths about the closeness of God.

1. God is never too busy for me. He never says, "Can you hold that thought? Can you wait just a minute? Can I put you on hold? Not now. Some other time." No matter what you come to God about and no matter when you come to God to talk to

Him about it, God never says, "Just a minute. Can you wait a second?" He is never too busy so you can come to Him at any time.

2. God loves to meet my needs. God is not begrudging. He doesn't say, "Come on! Weren't you here yesterday? Take a number. Don't you know I've got six billion people to care for? You had your shot." You can come to Him a million times a day saying, "God, I need help! I need strength again against that temptation. I need help again to not be so afraid. I need help again to calm my anger. I need help again to know what direction to go." God never gets tired of doing that.

3. He is sympathetic to my hurts. Some of you had fathers that when you got hurt your dad's response was basically, "Tough it out! Buck up. Get a stiff upper lip. Power through it. Ignore the pain." They were not sympathetic. They were not tender. They were not considerate of how you felt and your fears and the things that you were going through. As a result you probably tend to think God is like that. He's not. God is sympathetic to my hurts. The Bible says in Psalm 34 *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* He is a close Father so turn to Him.

4. He is a competent Father

He's not only caring, He's not only consistent, He's not only close, He's competent. He is capable. He can handle any problem you give Him. Nothing is beyond God's ability. That's good because if God cared and if God were aware but He didn't have any power to do anything about it, so what? It really wouldn't be much help, God saying, "I feel your pain! I can't do anything about it but I feel your pain." That wouldn't be too much help. But God is a competent Father.

The Bible says in Luke 1 *"Nothing is impossible with God."* I like that! That means He's competent. Nothing is impossible.

When I was growing up, I thought my dad could fix anything. If I broke it he knew how to fix it. I thought he was Superman. (Still do to tell you the truth.) You probably did too growing up. You probably thought your dad could do anything! But then as you grew up you realized he can't. He has limited wisdom. He has limited resources. He has limited energy. Some of those times when you went to your dad for advice, the truth is he was just guessing. It sounded pretty authoritative but he was just guessing. Having been a father, I know that.

But there is one Father who is not limited in resources or wisdom or energy. It is your heavenly Father. Ephesians 3:20 says *"God is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of – infinitely beyond our highest prayers or desires or thoughts or hopes."* God says, "You think of the biggest problem in your life, I can handle it!"

The bottom line is God is able to take care of His children because He is caring and consistent and close and competent.

So that leads me to an important question. Is God everybody's Father? Is everybody a child of God? The answer is yes and no. Yes, everyone was created by God but not everybody is connected to God. There's a lot more to being a father than just creating a kid. There are millions of kids in this world who have never known their father. It takes more than birthing to be a dad. It takes more than creating. It takes connection. Yes, every one in the world is created by God but no, everyone in the world is not connected to their Father, to their heavenly Father who made them. God wants them to be connected in His family.

How do I get connected to God as Father? That's why God sent His Son Jesus Christ to earth, to make the connection. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me you would know My Father as well."* There's only one way to get to know the Father – through Jesus Christ who God sent to earth to make the connection. That's why He sent Him to earth, so we could get to know Him. He sent Jesus to earth to make the connection. If you have never made that connection, you can make that connection today.

Friends, there is a Father who knows you intimately. And loves you completely. And accepts you unconditionally. And wants you. You can go to that Father for His approval and for His acceptance and for His advice and He is your heavenly Father. That Father – God – has seen every moment of your life. He watched you being formed in your mother's womb. He watched you take your first breath. He watched every tear that's fallen, every success you've had, every joy, every regret, every jealousy, every envy. He knows the good, the bad and the ugly about you and He still loves you. And He wants you as His child. And He wants you connected not just created.

Turn to Him. Say, "Father, I'm coming home to You."