PRAYER

The Lord’s Prayer
Connecting With God

“OUR FATHER”
The starting point, any time you’re in a problem, when you need renewal, revival, restoration in your marriage, in your career, in your life, in your community, in our nation, it always starts first with… reconnecting with God.

It’s our disconnect from God that causes all of the problems in our lives and in our nation.

Prayer is… “Connecting With God.” And connecting with God is… the starting point on the road to renewal, restoration, revival, recovery, – whatever you want to call it.

We’ve been talking about prayer the past few weeks. We’ve talked about the purpose of prayer, the conditions of prayer, how to pray for problems, and getting answers from God.

Today we’re going to begin to look at…how to pray. In fact we’re going to look at the how’s Jesus told his disciples to pray and the why’s behind the how’s. Still with me?

Matthew 6. Starting in verse 5 Jesus teaches how to pray. Here’s verses 5& 6 from the Message Bible: “And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.”

**How are we to come to God?** “as simply and honestly as you can” Billy Graham at the end of his crusade messages would ask people to come forward to give their lives to Jesus. How did he ask them to come? Anyone remember the song that always played? Just as I am.

> Just as I am, without one plea,  
> But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
> And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
> O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

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Verses 7&8: “The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need.”

Who are you coming to? “Your Father”

Many of you have known the Lord’s Prayer for years. You can pray it even without thinking about it. “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done...” But these are profound statements. When you understand the meaning behind them you’re going to find the peace in your life and stress declining. If you understand the Lord’s Prayer and you live it... it will change your life.

It starts with what two words? “Our Father.”

Jesus says in Matthew 6:9 “to pray like this: Our Father”

When Jesus said to pray to God as, Our Father, it broke all the rules. Until Jesus came to earth nobody really knew that God was Our Father. You wouldn’t know that God is your Father except for Jesus.

In the thousands of years covered in the Old Testament, God is called Father only 7 times. People didn’t think of God as Father. They thought of him as other things – creator, Lord, God Almighty. But they didn’t think of God as Father. Then Jesus comes along and says this is how you’re to pray: call him Father. Jesus uses Father over 150 times referring to God.

So He explodes the myths. Like God is not an angry tyrant. God is not the cosmic cop. He is not the universal killjoy. He is not the impersonal force. Instead he says God is a person, not a power. The reason you’re a person, is because you were created in the image of God. That makes us different from the animals. God is a personal God. And he has ability to have a relationship with us and he created you with the ability to have a relationship with him.
God is a person not a power. He is a Father, not a force. That’s why we don’t sign off our prayers saying, *May the force be with you!*

This is really good news because I can’t relate to some impersonal force. I can’t relate to some disembodied, spirit in the sky. But I can relate to a person. I can get to know and connect. I can have a relationship with God as Father.

But there is a potential problem. For many people the word “father” is a negative term. It brings up all kinds of bad memories, bad hurts and problems. Some people say, “If God’s like my father, no thanks God.

For a lot of people their only idea of father is “*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 moody, they can be abusive, they can be controlling and angry and demanding and self centered. So when we say our *Father in heaven* a lot of times we carry baggage in with it. And it’s no wonder we have a hard time connecting with God our Father in heaven.

If you grew up with an unreasonable father you’re going to tend to think God is unreasonable. You’re going to think God’s demands are unattainable. So why even try? A father who wants to make my life miserable.

If you grew up with an unreliable father who made promises and broke them, you’re going to have a hard time trusting God. So you tend God can’t be depended on. God won’t keep his promises.

If you grew up with an unconcerned father –he was there but he was just distant – you’re going to tend to think of God the same way. God’s too busy to bother with me. Here’s a biggie…

If you grew up with an unpleasable father no matter what you did was never good enough. You’re going to feel that God is upset with you all the time. Do you want to be around somebody who’s upset with you all the time? No. You avoid them. So you avoid God.
Here’s some sad truth in America today. Today, 25% of all white children are growing up without the presence of a father in the home. In our nation 50% of all Hispanic kids are growing up without the presence of a father in the home. And almost 75% percent of all black kids grow up without the presence of their father in the home.

It’s no wonder we struggle with “Our Father, who art in heaven.” Because there’s no connection. Many kids growing up today have little or no connection to their father. So why would they be expected to have a connection with their heavenly Father?

Dr. Paul Vitz a professor and psychologist at New York University, wrote a book called The Faith of the Fatherless. He did a study of 70 or so of the most famous atheists throughout history. Sigmund Freud, Carl Marx, Bertrand Russell. The only thing that he could find that they had in common was they all hated their dads. They didn’t have a natural connection to their father. He concluded that the absence of a good father is at the core of militant atheism.

What I’m going to try to do today is help you let go of some of the misconceptions you have about God and help you understand what God the Father is really like. Misconceptions keep us disconnected from God.

So what’s God really like? What kind of father is He? The Bible says one characteristic of the fatherhood of God is…

1. **He is a caring and loving Father.**

God loves you more than you will ever know. He loves you more than you will ever understand or comprehend. You don’t have the brain capacity to understand how much God loves you. God is love and he made you to love you. You wouldn’t exist if God hadn’t wanted to love you. His love and compassion are his most outstanding qualities. God is a loving and caring father.
Psalm 103:13 “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who honor him.” He cares about everything in your life – compassionately.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is Jesus and the disciples out fishing, most of these guys were professional fishermen. They’re out fishing on the lake one day and Jesus got tired and curled up in the back of the boat… (a 2075 Lund Tyee Magnum). So he’s napping next to the purr of the 300hp Mercury Verado outboard motor. Storms aren’t that big of a deal for professional fishermen. They’re used to fishing – rain and sleet and thunder and lightning. But this must have been a BIG one because they all got scared. The boat’s rocking and rolling and water’s coming in and they think they’re going to die. They frantically wake up Jesus and ask him one of the most important questions in life.

Before I tell you what that question was, let me just say this: if Jesus is in your boat it ain’t gonna to sink! No matter how big the storm is. So the key is whatever storm you’re facing, get Jesus in your boat. Wherever you want help, get Jesus in your boat.

You don’t want your marriage to sink? Get Jesus in your marriage. You don’t want your career to sink? Get Jesus in your career. You don’t want your relationships to sink? Get Jesus in your relationships. You want Jesus to help you in your life? Then get Jesus in your life! And your life isn’t going to sink.

But the disciples go and wake Jesus up and they ask this question, “Lord, don’t you care?” One of the most profound questions of life. “Don’t you care that we’re about to drown? Don’t you care?”

You and I ask God that question a thousand different ways all the time. “God, don’t you care? Do you see that doctor’s report? Don’t you care? You see the mess my marriage is in? Don’t you care? You see how little money we’ve got and all the bills? Don’t you care? God, you see my crappy job? God, don’t you care?”
The answer is YES, *God cares!* In fact, *He cares* more than *you care.* He wants to help more than *you* want help. He knows what will help you more than you know what will help you. He’s aware and he cares.

If you feel distant from God it’s because you don’t understand the kind of *caring* and *loving* Father he really is. It’s the first step to inner peace.

Next, God is not only a *caring* and *loving* Father…

2. **He is a close Father.**

He’s close. He’s not distant. He’s not far away. He’s right there with you every moment. Here’s what the Bible says about that Acts 17:27 “God did this so that people would reach out for him and find him since he is not far from each one of us.” God is with you right now. He’s not a million miles away. He’s a close Father.

A lot of people struggle with this because they grew up with absentee dads. Maybe a great dad but he was just never there. He was always working or doing something and when he was home he was disconnected. It’s pretty easy to think that maybe God’s like that. That he’s NOT close. He’s NOT really there.

Because of this many try to *earn* God’s love. You can’t earn God’s love. It’s a gift that God has given to you. You can’t earn it.

Here’s the encouraging news about God’s love for you. Number one. **God is never too busy for me.**

That’s how close he is. That’s the kind of love that he has. He’s never too busy. The Bible says in Psalm 145:18 “*The Lord is near to all who call on him.*” Every time you call, he’s right there.

God thinks about you a lot more than you think about him. The truth is sometimes, I get too busy for God. He never gets too busy for me. That’s encouraging. That’s how close he is.

More encouraging news…
God loves to meet my needs.

He doesn’t just do it because he has to. He *loves* to. Just like those of us who are parents. You love to meet the needs of your kids. You love to see the smile on their face.

Here’s what Jesus said in Matthew 7:11 “If you know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?”

One of the greatest things that you can do is begin to enjoy the fact that God enjoys giving good gifts to you. He loves to do it.

One more piece of encouraging news…

**He is sympathetic to my hurts.**

Psalm 34:18 “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit” God understands. He’s a close Father. God is caring and he’s close.

And there’s one other quality…

**3. He is a competent Father.**

He can handle ANY problem you give him. Nothing is beyond his ability. Nothing is too hard for him. No request is too big or too small.

Is it really ok for me to talk to God about the small things in my life? Look at it this way… can you imagine *any* problem that you’d have that God would consider big? NO! It’s ALL small stuff to God. There is nothing too big for God. Nothing is beyond his ability. He’s a competent Father.

That’s so important because today we have an epidemic in our nation of incompetent fathers. I don’t know if you’ve noticed it but there are no competent dads on television any more. Most dads on TV are doofuses. It’s not Father Knows Best. It’s Homer Simpson. It’s Family Guy. It’s Raymond. Today’s dad is the butt of the joke. That’s the kind of father that society is promoting today.
It’s like the kid at school bragging to another kid, “My dad could beat up your dad!” The other kid said, “Big deal! So can my mom!”

Nobody can beat up your heavenly Father. Nobody! “Nothing is impossible with God.” Impossible is not in God’s vocabulary.

When my kids were little they expected me to know it all, to fix anything, and to afford everything. As they grew up they learned that their father had limited knowledge, limited energy, limited resources, limited skills, limited everything.

But your heavenly Father really CAN do anything. The Bible says this Ephesians 3:20 “God is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of, infinitely beyond our highest prayers and desires and thoughts and hopes.” He says think of your biggest dream. I can dream bigger!

So let me ask … What have you been doubting that God can handle in your life? That’s too hard. It’s too big. It’s impossible. Listen for snickers from heaven. God specializes in the impossibles. God can do anything. He is a competent Father.

But is God everybody’s Father? No he’s not. God created everybody. God loves everybody. But he’s not everybody’s Father. You’ve got to choose to make him your Father. Just because you have the ability to create a baby doesn’t make you a dad. Lots of men have “fathered” babies they’ve never fathered.

God is the creator of everybody. And God loves everybody. And God wants everybody in his family. But you’re not in his family until you choose to be. That’s why God sent Jesus to earth to make the connection. Because God is perfect and holy and we’re not. We need a bridge. We need a go between. The Bible says 1 Timothy 2 “God is on the one side and all the people are on the other side. And Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together by giving his life for all mankind.” Between God and man is Jesus, and He said, I can bring you across to God.
How do you get into God’s family? How do you make God your Father? Galatians 3:26 “We are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.” It’s only through faith in Jesus. It’s the only way.

There’s a Father in heaven who loves you compassionately, he’s close and he’s competent. Connect with him through Jesus.

Prayer: “Dear Father, we want you to be our heavenly Father. And we want to be your kids. Thank you for sending Jesus to make that connection, and to make it possible for us to be apart of your family. From this point on we want to start putting our trust in you. Thank you for your caring. Thank you for being close even when we don’t know it. And thank you for being competent to handle ALL our problems. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen