

Matthew 6:7-13
God: Near and Far
July 26th, 2015

“He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” Jesus taught his disciples to pray at their request. He told them to go out and preach and teach, heal and cast out demons, but there is no record he taught them how to do any of those things.



But he taught his disciples to pray!!

Jesus teaches his disciples to go to the source of our covenant relationship with God. Jesus teaches us how to access all the power and authority we have as God’s children by going to God in prayer. And not just any prayer, but His prayer, the Lord’s Prayer and for that reason we need to pay particular attention to it. I believe if we know and understand this prayer it will lead to a deeper richer relationship with God and our fellow human beings. It will unlock a source of deep spirituality that comes directly from God.

Now I know that many think and feel this prayer is not important. It seems rote. It seems formulaic. It seems it is the opposite of what Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 6:7 “**And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.**” But many have prayed this prayer, so often in such a mindless fashion that it has become rote and empty and thus lacks power and meaning. In fact, I know of some from some Christian traditions who never learned or used the Lord’s Prayer in worship precisely because of that.

But today, and over the next 5 Sundays, I want to change that type of thinking through understanding and practice that will help make this

prayer a doorway for you into the heart and mind of God and God's will here on earth!!

Now to begin with, the Lord's Prayer was not meant to be recited mindlessly. There is no magic or righteousness in mindlessly repeating the prayer, but if you understand how to use the prayer it becomes a framework or outline for all your prayers.

It is a framework or outline of who and what to pray for and as you grow in your understanding of it, this prayer also inspires ways of praying.

It contains 4 basic types of prayer: contemplative prayer, intercessory prayer, petition and spiritual warfare prayer. Today we will work with contemplative prayer.

Now the prayer itself has 6 phrases and the Hexagon you see on page 7 in our bulletin illustrates this. This is one of the 8 "Life Shapes" that is used in the discipleship system that I use to train leaders. The hexagon shape will help us remember the phrases and their relationship with each other.



The first phrase is, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." It speaks of God near and far. The first word in the phrase is very important for understanding the whole, the first word is "our". Now at first, unless we think about it, we miss the deep meaning of that word being in the plural.

It doesn't say "My" Father... It says "Our Father..." Now some will be so egocentric as to think of course it should say "Our" because it refers to "me, myself and I", but the prayer is in the plural. "Our" is used in that it refers to all human beings, all of God's creation, all God's children, or the church, or our family and in the end to "me, myself, & I."

The plural expands our thinking and understanding that when we come before God in prayer as Jesus taught the prayer, it is inclusive and expansive. The prayer covers all people, all of creation.

Think of these 6 phrases in an expansive inclusive manner. “Our Father” reminds us God’s care extends even to the sparrows that when one falls from the air God knows and cares. For us, though, let’s think of it as sitting in the presence of God as we go through these 6 phrases and then come back to the first.

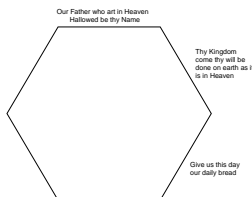


“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”



This reminds us to pray for and participate in bringing the Kingdom of God on earth. It reminds us to bring God’s love to the entire world for which Jesus died. It reminds us “For God so loved the WORLD he gave his only begotten son...”

We pray “Give us today our daily bread.”



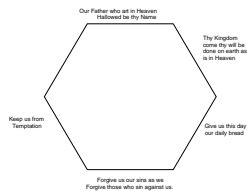
And pray not only for the food and the things we need but for food and the things all people need. We pray for the world, the nation, our family and self.

We pray **“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”**



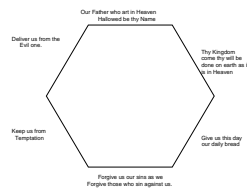
We pray our corporate sin be forgiven; the sin of humanity, our nation, church and self.

We pray **“And lead us not into temptation”**



as a prayer to be delivered from the testing of temptation and the evil one. We pray we all may be delivered from a time of trial because when one person trips and falls it brings us all down.

And final we pray **“but deliver us from the evil one.”**



We pray that all people everywhere be held safe from the forces of evil. We are not alone in all this. We are not alone in our struggle against sin and temptation and evil. It is a corporate battle that we fight together and Jesus said he will be with us always.

A friend of mine who is a recovering drug addict reminded me once; Jesus is with us always and **in our sin we take Jesus with us into places and situations that he does not want to go.** But Jesus is with us as we pray for forgiveness and the power to break the bonds of sin and resist the temptations of the evil one.

We are in covenant with God through Christ and God will never abandon us or forsake us. We are in this together not only with God but with each other and so we pray “Our Father”, Our Father, Our Father.

Now contrary to what many think referring to God as “Father” is not sexist. Yes, we can refer to God as Creator or simply God but then we miss the point that Jesus is trying to make here. The idea of how near and caring and loving God is. If “Father” doesn’t do it for you (to express these things) or you have negative connotations to “Father” because of a bad relationship with your father use “Mother”, use “Sister”, “Brother”, or “Uncle”, or Grandmother.

The idea that is being portrayed here by using “Father” is that of a caring loving relationship not simply the creative aspect of God. Some in their attempts to use non-sexist language refer to God always as “God” or “Creator” but that makes God always a distant God, a far away God and never brings God near to our hearts.

In our first phrase we go from God near “Father” to God far “in Heaven” and then he remains far “Hallowed” and then returns near to us “be your name”. If we simple use the words “God” or “Creator” God remains far and distant and from the beginning of the prayer we miss the intimacy, the closeness, the covenant relationship of oneness that Jesus wants us to experience, who loves us so much he knows how many hairs are on our head. In my case that is getting easier. 😊

In fact the use by Jesus of the word “Father” in reference to God would have been astounding to his hearers. In Jesus’ day God was seen as so distant and remote. God was not seen as particularly pleased with his people. God had given them 638 laws to follow and their image of God was God standing back just waiting to slap people down for breaking his laws, people with whom he wasn’t that particularly happy with in the first place.

God was seen as fearsome Judge and his people were living under his curse and the curse of their disobedience. And in this atmosphere of

oppression and fear Jesus refers to God as Father, a loving Caring Being who had their best interests at heart.



Jesus had his disciples pray to God and refer to God as Father, Abba, Daddy. Imagine coming from a religion where a distant God is feared as a condemning Judge and you now refer to God using terms of endearment like Abba, Daddy. Imagine then the sense of grace and love that came from that.



We then can pray with arms up lifted to God, not simply in praise because it feels right to lift our arms in praise,



but like little children raising our arms up to be picked up and held by our loving Daddy who is God.



The word **“Heaven”** is next. **“Our Father in heaven,”** This is God far, far away. This is God beyond this universe, beyond the dimensions of time, height, length, weight, depth. As the popular praise song goes, *“God of wonders beyond our galaxy. You are holy. You are Holy.”* The place where God and Jesus Christ have their permanent address, the place that is our forever home is heaven. Here we are strangers and aliens but we have a heavenly Father whose love draws us home.

“Holy” indeed is God. **“Hollowed be your name.”** This again is God far away. **To be “holy” is to be “set apart”.** To be separated for a special purpose. God is totally other. God is power, strength, perfect—holy—our God is an awesome God.

Now, the idea of separation, estrangement, and alienation does not need to be added to human experience of God—it’s already there. We are separated, estranged, alienated from God. We are unholy and sinful and yet in and through Christ when God sees us he sees Christ. If Jesus is in the least of these and God sees Jesus in the least of these God sees Jesus in you and me!

Contemplate for a moment the awesome distance of our God who is so powerful he created the universe, and yet so close we are referred to as the apple of his eye—God near and far.

Finally, “your name,” (hallowed be your name) We know God’s name. Jehovah, Yahweh, I AM WHO I AM, Jesus. To know a person’s name in Jesus’ day was to be intimately connected to that person. A name was believed to be intrinsically a part of a person as much as an arm or a leg. To know a name was to be connected in a powerful way and in Jesus’ case to have power over another.

Now, you have probably heard the story of the little boy who was asked if he knew God’s name. Immediately he said “Art”, because you know the prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven...”

The first phrase of the Lord’s Prayer moves us from near to far to near again. We begin with **Our Father**, we move then beyond the universe into heaven (**in heaven**), we are far separated by God’s holiness (**hallowed**) and then we return to knowing his name (**be your name**) Yahweh, Jesus.

This brings us into deep contemplation of our God who is so far and yet as close as our next breath and the hug of our own earthly

mother or father, or grandfather, or child. Earlier I said this first phrase engenders contemplative prayer.



Contemplative prayer is resting before God and thinking on his attributes. It is sitting in the lap of God.



Contemplation is resting before God to be blessed, to hear God. It is to rest to hear the still small voice of God. Contemplation is sitting with your favorite friend or loved one where not a word needs to be spoken to be empowered and strengthened by the other's presence.

Contemplative prayer is clearing our mind and life of all distraction to be with God, simply be with God. So.... make sure your cell phones, iPad's, and iPods are turned off if you want to experience contemplative prayer. Maybe even go into this beautiful desert and lift your eyes up to the hills.

I invite you to experience a moment of contemplative prayer. I have a video clip that we will play in a moment to help us do this. I want you to take a deep breath and let it out. Watch the video and when it is done we will rest for a moment before we pray together our Lord's Prayer. It begins with the noise of an alarm clock and ends in silence.

ROLL VIDEO CLIPP "I AM GOD"

Lord's Prayer

My challenge to you today is that during these next 5 weeks as we study the Lord's Prayer that you take 10 minutes a day to just sit in

God's lap in silence and listen. Taking 10 minutes may seem like an eternity for some but if you do this you will be blessed!!