

THE LORD'S PRAYER: ABBA'S CHILD

Big Idea: We pray as God's children.

Purpose: To challenge people to pray as a child of God.

Passage: Matthew 6:9-13 **Verse:** Matthew 6:9a

Opening

We have no clue how to pray

-Most of us have no clue how to pray. This is on full display in numerous movies. Our family just enjoyed one of those scenes when we watched *Christmas Vacation*. Clark asks Aunt Bethany to say the blessing over Christmas dinner. Instead of saying a prayer, Aunt Bethany says the Pledge of Allegiance. In short order everyone at the table has their hand on their heart and is repeating it with her.

There is the scene from *Meet the Parents* where Robert DeNiro puts Ben Stiller to the test and asks him to pray over dinner. Ben's character Greg cobbles together fragments of prayers he has heard and ends with - *O dear Lord, three things we pray, to love thee more dearly, to see thee more clearly and follow thee more nearly. Day by day by day. Amen.*

And then there is the scene from *Talladega Nights* where Will Ferrell is praying over a meal and keeps referring to Jesus as *Baby Jesus*. We laugh when we see these scenes because we can relate to them. Most of us have no clue how to pray.

-When our daughter Jubilee was 4, she started to insist on praying for our family meals every night. She would dutifully fold her hands together but would keep her eyes wide open. Then she would begin to thank God for everything she saw. She would thank God for her plate. She would thank God for the chicken Mommy made. Thank you for the potatoes. Thank you for the peas. She would wrinkle her nose at that one, not sure if she should thank God for peas. She would then thank God for each member of our family, including our dog and any stuffed animals that joined us that night. She would then start thanking God for inanimate objects in the room. On and on she would go. She was a machine. Sometimes I would cut her off with a quick *Amen*. She would look at me disapprovingly and keep going. Did she even know what she was doing? Do any of us know what we are doing when we pray?

Teach us to pray

-Jesus' disciples didn't know how to pray. After spending time with Jesus, after watching him pray and listening to him pray, they desperately asked him, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" (Luke 11:1) The Apostle Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, didn't know how to pray. In his letter to the Romans, he proclaimed, "*We do not know what we ought to pray for.*" (Romans 8:26a) I can relate.

-Most of us are saddled with *prayer insecurity*. We aren't sure what we should pray for. We aren't sure if we are using the right words. Our minds drift as we pray. Sometimes we

even fall asleep. When we are praying with others, our prayer insecurity is especially heightened. We have this sense that others know how to pray. But the truth is that most of us have no clue how to pray. That includes me—and I am paid to pray!

-Jesus knew all of this. That is why Jesus teaches us how to pray. He does so in a prayer we refer to as the **Lord's Prayer**. In His preface to the Lord's Prayer, Jesus simply states, "*This, then, is how you should pray.*" The Lord's Prayer is Jesus' attempt to teach us how to pray.

-Today we are starting a 5-week series on the Lord's Prayer, ***The Lord's Prayer: Learning How to Pray***. We thought it would be awesome to start a new year by being reminded—or learning how—to pray. The Lord's Prayer will be our guide.

Some of you have the Lord's Prayer memorized. If you do not have it memorized, I want to encourage you to do so. We will be using the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6 as our guide. At the end of the prayer, we will also be saying the *doxology* which is not included in the earliest manuscripts we have and which is not part of most translations, although there is often a footnote that includes it. Martin will be praying the Lord's Prayer for us today. Feel free to say it along with him.

This, then, is how we should pray.

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today 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 the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen. (Matthew 6:9b-13)*

Introduction

Popular words

-My theologian friend, Nijay Gupta, wrote a commentary on the Lord's Prayer which I recommend. Nijay states, "*It is widely acknowledged that these five verses happen to be the most well-known, most memorized, and most recited portion of Scripture since the inception of Christianity.*" Many of Jesus' words are well-known and much discussed, none more than the Lord's Prayer.

Three forms

-We find the Lord's Prayer in three different forms in the Bible. The first is found in **Matthew 6** as part of the *Sermon on the Mount*. The second is from **Luke 11**. If you compare the two, they have substantial alignment but are different. Like most Scripture, Jesus' prayer was passed down from oral tradition before it was ever written down. Apparently, there were at least two versions of the prayer passed along through the

generations. The Matthew 6 prayer has become the most common, and was closely reproduced in the 3rd version of the prayer which we find in the *Didache* (*did-uh-key*). The *Didache* is a late 1st century or early 2nd century document detailing how the earliest followers of Jesus were to do church. Part of *following* Jesus meant *praying like* Jesus, so followers of Jesus were encouraged to pray the Lord's Prayer at 9, 12 and 6 each day.

The origin of Jesus' prayer

-Most scholars believe the Lord's Prayer originated from Jesus' prayer life as a boy and young man. As a pious Jew, Jesus would have prayed daily in the morning, afternoon and evening, as well as at prayer times. Jesus would have prayed the Psalms, the 18 benedictions, and then a prayer called the Kaddish. The Lord's Prayer reflects influences from all three of these sources. Jesus' model prayer was drawn from His own prayer life.

-Jesus' prayer was likely originally spoken in Aramaic before being translated into Greek. It is a short and simple prayer. It has 6 or 7 petitions depending on if you break verse 13 into two petitions. We will explore each petition throughout the series.

Pray this or pray like this?

-One of the most important questions we must answer is: Should we pray the Lord's Prayer or pray *like* the Lord's Prayer? Is the Lord's Prayer meant to be recited verbatim or is it meant to be a catalyst and guide for our prayer lives? As is often the case, there are two extremes. One extreme never recites the Lord's Prayer because they believe saying written prayers, even the prayer of Jesus, is constraining. The other extreme recites the Lord's Prayer verbatim on a regular basis but doesn't do much other praying.

-I believe that reciting the Lord's Prayer is a beautiful way to pray and it should be part of our private and corporate prayer life. When we struggle to know what to pray, we should start with praying things we know for sure we should pray. But it shouldn't stop there. The Lord's Prayer is not a magic formula. **The Lord's Prayer should be a model and guide for our prayer life.** It should provide seeds and sparks as a catalyst for our prayer life. It should also provide guardrails when our prayers begin to center on things they shouldn't center on.

-The Lord's Prayer is often referred to as the *Our Father* since that is the opening address and first two words of the prayer. Let's consider each of those words.

Father

God as Father

-If we read the Lord's Prayer in Greek or Latin, we will notice that the first word of the prayer is *Father*. This is a metaphor that was used to describe God in the Old Testament. Israel considered itself a son adopted by God. When Moses stood before Pharaoh, he referred to Israel as *God's son*. Even though God was referred to as *Father* in the Old Testament, it was not a common metaphor for God. It was used only 15 times.

-But Father was one of Jesus' favorite and most common ways to refer to God. Jesus refers to God as His Father over 170 times. When Jesus refers to God as His Father, He

most often uses a word borrowed from Aramaic. Jesus and other Jews spoke Aramaic to one another. But the New Testament is written in Greek. The Aramaic term Jesus uses for father, the word **Abba**, is one of the few Aramaic words to be carried into the Greek New Testament. That is how important the term is to understanding who God is to Jesus.

Abba is a very intimate and tender word. It could be equivalent to our word *daddy*. We can refer to someone as our father in the biological sense. We all have a father. But we do not all have a *daddy*. In the first century, *abba* was a term used within a home between a child and a father. It suggested accessibility, trust and love. It is almost impossible to find other examples in the first century where people referred to *Yahweh* as *Abba* outside of Jesus and His followers. Jesus' use of the term in reference to God was unconventional to say the least. The use of it at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer makes this a prayer of a child to a dad.

-The use of the father metaphor for God is both wonderful and limiting. Let's consider the strength of the metaphor.

The strength of the *father* metaphor

-As we often say, *the Bible is not written to us but it is written for us*. The Bible is an ancient document. To understand what it has for us, we must understand its original context. In the first century, Greco-Roman society was ordered through household codes. A household would have consisted of multiple generations of family living and working under the same roof. The household would have also included workers and slaves. The leader of a household was a man known as the *paterfamilias*. This term meant *father of the family*. The *paterfamilias* was typically the oldest living male in a household. A household's *paterfamilias* was the biological head, the legal head and the financial head of the entire family.

The primary role of the *paterfamilias* was to protect and provide for the entire family. His job was to keep everyone alive and flourishing. The *paterfamilias* held the life of his family in his hands. Mothers obviously played the key biological role in families and were also often the engine of the day-to-day operations of the household. But a mother did not have the same authority as the *paterfamilias*. We may not like how these households were constructed, but understanding the reality helps us to understand the metaphor.

-When Jesus starts His prayer by referring to God as His Father, He is referring to God as His *paterfamilias* - the One who was responsible to protect and provide, the One who held His life in His hands. By using the Aramaic term *Abba* to refer to His Father, Jesus is telling us that He has an intimate, trusting, and loving relationship with His *paterfamilias*. In this context, it is a powerful metaphor.

The limitations of the *father* metaphor

-But like every metaphor, the metaphor of God as Father also has limitations.

Limitation #1 is when the metaphor is inappropriately used to reinforce patriarchy.

Patriarchy is a social system where men wield primary power and privilege. It is the social system that has dominated history and dominates the present. It is not the social system

that God desires. If we use the metaphor of God as father to reinforce patriarchy, we are misusing it. The Lord's Prayer is not a charter for male domination.

-*Limitation #2* is when the metaphor of God as Father is used to present God as a male. We must remember it is just a metaphor. God does not have a gender. God is not male or female. God is referred to metaphorically in both masculine and feminine terms. God is referred to as both a father and a mother in Scripture.

-*Limitation #3* is that many people don't have loving fathers. Sadly, when some of you think about your father, you think about the man who abandoned you, or cheated on your mother, or beat or abused you. Some of you could not imagine calling your father *daddy*. I grieve with you. That is not the way it is supposed to be. Many people have dad wounds. When you begin a prayer '*Our father...*' you immediately find the barriers going up. My encouragement is to not think of God through the lens of your earthly father, but to allow God to transform your experience of what an earthly father is meant to be.

-Every metaphor has its limitations, especially when used of God. We must attempt to allow the metaphor to operate in the way it is intended to operate. In this case, when Jesus starts His prayer with *Our Father...*, we are meant to think of God as the loving, trustworthy father who provides for our needs; as the father who gives anything and everything to keep us alive and flourishing.

Wesley Hill is another theologian who has written a commentary on the Lord's Prayer. In the final week of this series, I am really looking forward to having a conversation with Nijay and Wesley. Wesley writes,

"Any picture of God as "Father" that leads us to think in terms of domination and cruelty rather than of humble service and unending love is not a true understanding of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who loved [us] and gave himself for [us]." (Wesley Hill)

Our Father

The same dad

-But God is not just Jesus' Father. Jesus doesn't pray *my* Father; He prays *our* Father. **That means everything.** God is *our Father* as well. **These two words, *our Father*, hold the promise of the gospel.** Through His death and resurrection, Jesus provides a pathway for each of us to become children of God. Because of Jesus, we are given the opportunity to become part of the family of God. John tells us,

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13)

-This means that Jesus, our Savior, also becomes our elder brother. The writer of Hebrews says it this way:

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their

salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. (Hebrews 2:10-11)

-This is why the writers of the New Testament so frequently refer to followers of Jesus as *brothers and sisters*. They are trying to remind them that they have the same Dad. That is what Jesus wants us to remember as we pray. We are praying to *our Father*. We are not praying to *my Father*. We are praying to *our Father*.

Individualism

-We are almost blinded to seeing that distinction. We live in world of individualism. The problem is that *the way of Jesus is the polar opposite of individualism*. The way of Jesus is all about the *plural* and not the *singular*. The way of Jesus teaches us to pray *our Father* not *my Father*.

-I struggle with this more than most of you. I am an only child. When you tell people you are an only child, they actually step back look you up and down and say, "Oh." It's like suddenly you are transformed into an exotic zoo animal. There are strengths and weaknesses of being an only child. One of the weaknesses is that it predisposes you to individualism. It has always been easier for me to go it alone instead of working with a team. I still struggle with living life in the plural. I am a work in progress.

-The Scriptures are filled with the *plural*, not the *singular*. Often, when it is plural, we still see singular because we are so used to the individualistic mindset. Case in point: There is no unique second-person plural pronoun in English. We say *you* whether we are speaking to an individual or a group. Our friends down South tried to solve this issue with the word *y'all*, but Biblical translators just can't bring themselves to use it. This limitation, combined with our bent towards individualism, causes us to miss important aspects of Scripture. Most of the letters in the New Testament were not written to individuals but to churches. When we see the word *you* in these letters, we usually read it in the singular but it is almost always meant to be read in the plural.

-If you look over the Lord's Prayer, you will notice it is full of plural not singular. ***Our Father, give us our daily bread, forgive us our debts, lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil.*** We cannot read or pray the Lord's Prayer in the singular. We read it and pray it in the plural. **When we begin to read in the plural and pray in the plural, we begin to live in the plural.** We recognize that what unites us is far greater than what divides us.

Praying with The Church

-It is for this reason that even when we pray the Lord's Prayer in private, we still pray *our Father*. We do so because we do not pray alone, we are praying in the plural; we're praying with the church, we are praying with our brothers and sisters. As we pray this prayer, especially when we are alone, I want us to picture all the people we are praying with. We are praying with our brothers and sisters from New Hope. We are praying with our brothers and sisters from other churches all over the city. We are praying with brothers and sisters from all over the state. We are praying with brothers and sisters all

over the world. We are praying with brothers and sisters throughout history. We are praying with our Eldest Brother who sits at the right hand of our Father.

Big Idea

We often pray out of insecurity.

-The truth is that we often pray out of *insecurity*. We aren't sure what to say. We aren't sure God is even listening. We aren't sure even if God *is* listening that He will take our words seriously. We aren't sure if we are worthy enough for God to take our words seriously. We pray as illegitimate children. We mumble and bumble our prayers with our eyes cast down like panhandlers with no expectation that anyone will give a dime.

We are meant to pray as God's children.

-With the first two words of His model prayer Jesus puts all that to rest. With two words, *our Father*, we are reminded of our birthright. We are reminded who our Dad is. We are reminded who our Elder Brother is. With two words, we acknowledge that we belong, we are not illegitimate, we are children of God and that God is listening. Our Father, our paterfamilias, is the Maker of heaven and earth.

-Paul reminds the followers of Jesus in Rome of this wonderful reality:

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ....(Romans 8:15-17a)

-Author Brennan Manning reminds us that being Abba's child is our *core identity*. It defines who we are more than anything else defines who we are. Because of this truth, we are meant to pray with audacity, expecting God to answer. This is why the writer of Hebrews tells us *we can come boldly before the throne of grace to find mercy and help in time of need*. We don't have to come timidly as someone who doesn't belong in the presence of the King. We come as children of the King. We pray as children of the King.

We expect God to give good gifts

-Because we pray as God's children, we expect God to give good gifts.

Over the last few months our 10-year-old daughter Jubilee had about a million different Christmas lists. Each time she presented us with her list she was bold and she expected us to come through. Why? We are her parents. Now, a few of the requests were unreasonable. And a few we deemed unwise.

Jubilee really wanted a hamster for her room. We thought having a little pet would build her responsibility but we determined that getting a hamster with two relatively crazy dogs, one of whom is a mouser, would be unwise.

So, she settled on a goldfish and a large stuffed monkey from Santa. Both Santa and her parents came through. Why? We are her parents. We love to give her good gifts. Look at that smile. We love to give Jubilee good gifts. I can't imagine that we would ever not get Jubilee something she asked for just because she didn't use the right words. And yet that is the mindset we often pray with.



-Jesus put that foolish notion to rest. Just a little bit after Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer, He says this,

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, 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!"

(Matt. 7:7-9)

-When we pray as God's children, we can expect God to hear our prayers and we can expect God will give us good gifts that align with His will for our lives. Why? This is what good parents do. So, when we begin our prayers with *our Father*, we can expect God to answer with things that are good for us.

-I can't say it any better than Wesley Hill.

God doesn't require a flawless recitation of certain phrases, as if He were poised to fly into a rage in the absence of the right formula or performance. No, Jesus says, God is "your (our) Father," and He already is disposed favorably toward you (us). "Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Isa 65:24). Go find a quiet place where you can relax, Jesus seems to say. Unclench your fists. Breathe deeply. Let your heart rate decrease. Know that you're already bathed in the Father's love, and ask simply for what you need, in the assurance that the One to whom you're speaking is already cupping His ear in your direction. That's what prayer should be. (Wesley Hill)

We want New Hope to be a house of prayer.

-We are choosing to start 2021 with a series on prayer because our deepest desire is that New Hope would be a praying church. Our prayer is that New Hope would become a house of prayer. That will only happen if we start to pray regularly and fervently. I want to challenge you to join us at our Prayer Walk on January 10th. We want to start our journey as a new church bathing one another, the property, and the neighborhood in prayer.

-I want to also challenge you to memorize the Lord's Prayer and if you are able to stop and pray is every day. When we start our prayer and say the words *our Father*, we will be reminded we are not alone. We are praying with the church. *We are praying as God's children*. We are praying as children of *Our Father*, the King.