

**Our Father: The Necessity and Wonder of Prayer**  
**Part 2: Who Is “Our Father”?**

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*“This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,*

*<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come,  
your will be done,*

*on earth as it is in heaven.*

*<sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread.*

*<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.’*

– Matthew 6:9-13

**I. Addressing God / “Our Father”**

The God of the Bible – the One True God – gets a lot of different titles throughout Scripture, but Jesus chooses one particular title and one particular image for God as this prayer begins: “Our Father.”

Throughout the Old Testament, God is referred to as a Father in several different places. Just one example:

*“Is this the way you repay the Lord,  
you foolish and unwise people?*

*Is he not your Father, your Creator,  
who made you and formed you?”*

– Deuteronomy 32:6

So, when Jesus says that God is “Our Father” this isn’t a completely novel idea. However, in the first century Jewish world, to call God “Father” was far from the norm.

“The Jews of this period preferred exalted titles for God, like ‘Sovereign Lord,’ ‘King of the Universe,’ and the like. Jesus called him Father.” – D.A. Carson

The language of “Father” communicates that God is relational and personal.

*“[Your] Father in heaven... [is the One who] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” – Matthew 5:45b*

*He is “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles,”*

– 2 Corinthians 1:3b-4a

*He is “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished;” – Exodus 34:6b-7a*

Is that someone worth talking to? Is that someone who is worth pouring out your anxieties and concerns toward? Is that someone who is worth requesting things from? Is that someone who is worth cultivating a relationship with?

When it comes to this prayer, one of the big reasons why I think Jesus tells us to start “Our Father,” is because when we speak those words, it reminds us that God is a *relational* and *personal* God.

Which contrasts with other ways of thinking about the Divine and about what prayer is all about.

## **II. Who the Father Is Not**

*“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” – Matthew 6:7*

Jesus is probably not *exactly* forbidding long prayers.

Jesus himself had extended times of prayer. For instance, Luke 6:12 we see Jesus praying all night long, so it seems.

“Babbling like pagans” ... that’s significant here.

The word for pagans is the Greek word *ethnikoi*, a word that is translated “Gentiles” in other contexts. Here it is used to refer to the group of people who do not know the One True God and therefore don’t really know how to pray properly.

“Greek prayers sometimes piled up as many titles of the deity addressed as possible, hoping to secure his or her attention. Pagan prayers typically reminded the deity of favors done or sacrifices offered, attempting to get a response from the god on contractual grounds.”

– Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*

What’s going on here, then?

Jesus cautions against a mode of prayer here where a person thinks if they just use all the right words and say those words enough, a particular result will automatically happen.

The Father is not like a vending machine!

In other religious traditions, and even within Christian circles, sometimes prayer is done in a mode where we think if we just say the right words with enough confidence, God will answer our prayers in the way we hope.

But it doesn’t work like that. The Father cannot be manipulated.

The Father is relational and personal. He’s also the person who knows all things and is in charge of all things. He gets to respond how He chooses, according to how He sees fit.

### **III. The Father Knows What We Most Need**

In Jesus' final words before he teaches how to pray, he says this:

*"Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."* – Matthew 6:8

God orchestrates situations all the time where He shows this. Yes, the Father knows what you need.

And I don't know exactly how it works in terms of God's sovereignty and how that intersects with our free will or agency and the decisions we make. But what I am confident in is this: the Father knows it all, He knows what's best for you, and somehow, He's working all things for the good of those who love him, who've been called according to his purpose (see Romans 8:28).

And when it comes to prayer, we bring the Father our needs, even if we're not exactly sure what those needs are. I love how the theologian and writer Helmut Thielicke puts it:

*"Thank God that our prayer does not depend on our expressing the correct desires, that it does not depend on our making a correct 'diagnosis' of our needs and troubles and then presenting God with a properly phrased and clearly outlined prayer-proposition."* – Helmut Thielicke

What we most need is a Father who knows what we most need.

To put it more simply, what we most need is Him.

### **IV. The Father Gives What We Most Need**

Later in the Lord's Prayer we read the request, *"[Forgive] us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* – Matthew 6:12

And that's what the Father gives us in Jesus.

In Mark 2, we see this story where a paralyzed man is longing for healing. And the first thing Jesus does is give him forgiveness. Jesus granted this man his other longing as well, but he starts by giving the man something that's better – and something that the man perhaps didn't even really know he needed.

But what we most need is not just forgiveness, as though once we're off the hook for the ways we've missed the mark now "all is good."

The Father doesn't just give us forgiveness in Jesus, the Father gives us himself in and through Jesus.

In John 14, in Jesus' interaction with one of his disciples, the disciple asks, *"Show us the Father."* And his response: *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* – John 14:9.

Which means this: In Jesus we see the Father. And more...

Jesus goes on to lay down his life on the cross and then takes it up again three days later so that we can be reconciled to the Father in and through him.

In Jesus we get the Father.

We get reconciliation to relationship with Him. We get to access into the very life of God. We get to now relate to the Father just like Jesus relates to the Father.

## Life Group Questions

1. As you pray, what word or set of words do you most commonly use to address God? “Lord”? “Jesus”? “God”? “Heavenly Father”? Something else? Where do you think you learned that from?
2. What images, thoughts, or emotions come to the surface when you hear the word “Father”? Do you ever struggle to address God as “Father”? Why do you think this is the case for you?
3. Have you ever heard others pray in a way where they seemed to expect that God would automatically respond in a certain way? Do you have any stories to tell that relate to this? Have you ever approached prayer like God is a vending machine?
4. In verse 8, Jesus says, “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Have you ever felt like you didn’t know what you needed or what to pray for? How does this verse encourage or challenge you?
5. What’s your main “takeaway” from this sermon and this discussion as it relates to your prayer life? What changes or shifts do you think God might be leading you to make in your prayer life as a ‘next step’?

## Prayer

Take some time to share prayer requests and pray for each other. Pray that your group would come to know the Father’s love more deeply and that your lives would be lived in a way that reflects the Father’s character to the world around us (see Matthew 5:45).