

How to Pray: Our Father in Heaven

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

February 21, 2010

Pastor Michael McCall

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray...my prayer in these weeks of Lent is that Jesus will teach us.

**Matthew 6:9-13 "This, then, is how you 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.
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 Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the Glory. Amen.**

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." A child prayed "Our Father in heaven, Harold be your name." Another "Our Father in heaven, how do I know your name?" We don't know God's name apart from God telling us. And Jesus, as God, tells his followers to address God as **"Our Father."** Until Jesus walked on earth to let us know what God was like, nobody knew God as Father. They thought of God as Creator, Almighty, and so on...but only 7 times as "Father" in the whole Old Testament. Then Jesus comes and says this is how his disciples are to pray: "call God...**Our Father.**" Jesus uses the expression over 150 times referring to God. In two words, Jesus exploded all the stereotypes: God is not the angry tyrant nor the cosmic cop nor the universal killjoy nor an impersonal force nor all these other things that people want to make God out to be. Jesus teaches: **God is personal and God is a person.** The reason you are a person is because you were created in the image of God...that makes you different from the animals. And the reason God is personal is because God created you with the ability to have a relationship with Him. This IS the good news. We can have an intimate, relationship with Almighty God as His own child.

Sadly, for some people the word "father" is a negative term that brings up all kinds of bad memories and deep wounds. "If God is like my father, then no way." Some human fathers make home a hell on earth. Some human fathers can be moody, abusive, controlling, demanding, selfish, self-centered, violent, and aloof. Why am I going into this? Because I deal with people wounded by fathers all the time. Because the majority of the children in our country do not have a father in their home. And because it is critical – that we let God heal us, that we let God step in the gap, and that we grasp the significance, identity, and relationship we have as God's children.

Know that our Father in heaven is a caring Father.

Psalms 103:13 "As a father has compassion (not just love, but compassion) on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who honor him."

God is a caring, loving, compassionate father. God loves you more than you will ever know...more than you will ever understand or can ever comprehend. It would be like an ant understanding a human being. An ant does not have the capacity to understand a higher being and you do not have the capacity brain-wise to understand and fathom the love of God. God is love and God made you to love you. Uncaring human fathers produce emotionally needy children. Our Heavenly Father's children are loved to their core so they can be whole and able to love others. God is love.

Know that our Father in heaven is a consistent Father.

James 1:17 "Every good and perfect gift is from the Father. (life, love, the air we breathe, family, friends, everything that is good came from God the Father) who does not change like shifting shadows." Malachi 3:6 "I, the Lord, do not change."

God is a dependable, trustworthy, consistent Father. God is not moody. God doesn't wake up grumpy or grouchy. God is not fickle. You can count on God to always act the same toward you.

Human fathers are often unpredictable. Inconsistent fathers produce insecure children. Our father God is faithful so God's children can have faith and trust. Even in the midst of a changing world, God remains God. Everything else is temporary...so it is vital to be alive to God and in God...eternally and in the free fall of everyday life. God does not break his promises. Broken promises cause resentment and rebellion. God is dependable, trustworthy, and consistent. God is God.

Know our Father in heaven is a close Father.

Acts 17:27 "God did this (all God has done in history) so that people would reach out for him and find him since he is not far from each one of us." Psalms 145:18 "The Lord is near to all who call on him." Psalms 34:18 "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted..."

God the Father is not distant. God is not far away. God is as close as your next breath...your next heartbeat. Father God is right there with you every moment. God is with you right now. It might feel like God is a million miles away...but feelings and reality don't always match. The truth is God is right here right now. You want to be close to God? God wants to be close to you. God thinks about you a lot more than you think about Him. Sometimes I get too busy for God. God never gets too busy for me. And God knows me better than I know myself. God understands what I struggle to convey. God's own spirit prays through me when I don't have the words (Romans 8:26). One of the first words babies in Jesus' day learned was "Abba." It means "Dada or Daddy." Jesus tells us, his disciples, to address God the Father as "Papa." That is how personal God wants you to be with him.

Know our Father in heaven is a competent Father.

Ephesians 3:14-15,20 "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name...Now to God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine..." Luke 1:37 "For nothing is impossible with God."

God is able. This is really important when you are facing big problems. God can handle any problem you give Him. Nothing is beyond God's ability. Nothing is too hard for God. Nothing is beyond God's resources. No request is too big or too small. We have an epidemic in our nation of incompetent fathers. On television most dads are deadbeats or doofusses. Like the boy who said, "My dad could beat up your dad!" The other boy said, "Big deal! So can my mom!" Children of God, nobody can beat up your Heavenly Father. When my kids were little they expected me to know all, to fix all, and to afford all. They grew up and learned I have limited knowledge, limited energy, limited resources, limited skills, limited everything. As children of God, when we grow up in our faith, we discover that our Father in heaven really can do anything and everything. God really is able.

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name." When we understand what God is really like as a Father, we will want to reverence the name of God. With "our Father", God calls us His own. God's gives us our identity. God heals our deep wounds. God fills our emptiness. God makes us part of His forever family. Through "Our Father in Heaven", we enter the portal of prayer.