



Teach Us to Pray: "Our Father"

Luke 11:1-4

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First Presbyterian Church - Colorado Springs, CO

Jim Singleton

Preface

Today we turn the page into the 11th chapter of Luke's gospel, and we find ourselves in an amazing prayer. The prayer we call The Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is also found in Matthew, within the Sermon on the Mount. There are some tiny differences between the two versions. We normally pray the one from Matthew – so pay attention to this one. For the next five weeks I will be teaching on the version of the Lord's Prayer found in Luke, working phrase by phrase through the text. These five weeks will actually lead us into two more weeks on prayer from Luke 11. For the summer we will study the book of Psalms, which is itself a book of prayers. I believe that God is leading us to spend an extended period of time studying prayer. I am a little daunted by this because prayer is not my best subject. I love Bible study of all types – I love church history – I love missions. With regards to prayer I am afraid I am in the slow group. I have delayed preaching on prayer in the hope that I might one day be better at it before teaching on it. Perhaps the study needed to teach on prayer will enhance my prayer life. I am not sure of all the reasons why I am not a better prayer. Maybe I just do not sit still well enough. Maybe it is that I am too self-reliant. Ever since I was in Egypt last June I have become aware of my need for growth in this area. My guess is that I am not alone in this need and that many of us are in the same boat.

Introduction

The Lord's Prayer begins with two very important words – "Our Father." For some, the image of Father is a great thing – evoking great memories. For others it raises a very different picture.

Here are two observations from children. A little boy was showing his new next door friend around his house. Pointing to a room in the basement he said, "This is my father's den." Then he added, "Does your father have a den too?" The friend replied, "No, my father growls all over the place." That says something about "Father."

Second, a Sunday school teacher asked a little boy: "Bobby, do you believe in the devil? The boy said, "No, he's just like Santa Claus. I think it's my Daddy." That is another picture of Father.

Jesus had a very positive picture of the Father. It may have started with the faithfulness of Joseph. By age twelve this awareness was such that Jesus wanted to be about his "Father's business."

Jesus will now urge us to think of the Father when we pray, but let's look at a couple of things first.

1) Jesus Praying

Luke has tried to show us this pattern of Jesus praying throughout the book. Jesus is a praying person (3:21-22; 5:16; 6:12; 10:21-22; 22:39ff.) That is rather interesting because there are some who understand the nature of Jesus as really not needing to pray. He was God in the flesh – so wouldn't prayer be talking to himself? Yet, Jesus was fully human as well – and as such a model for us. So if Jesus prayed, why do we not pray?

2) "Lord, teach us to pray."

Having now seen Jesus praying again – the disciples want Jesus to teach them to pray. They feel a little neglected in this area because John the Baptist had taught his followers a prayer. You may remember that Andrew had been a disciple of John.

As Jesus teaches them a model or a structure for prayer, notice a couple of preliminaries. The prayer is short – it can be prayed slowly in less than a minute. Jesus has instructed his disciples not to heap up long and empty phrases like the Pharisees. There are places for long prayers – and Jesus once prayed all night choosing his disciples. This model is short – yet each phrase will show us an aspect of prayer.

Presbyterians used to pray long prayers in our services. You might ask yourself why Presbyterians sit to pray. If you have gone to Episcopal churches they kneel to pray – but we sit. There is not a single verse in the Bible that instructs people to sit for prayer. Years ago, Presbyterian pastors were in the habit of praying long prayers – often 20 to 30 minutes. It was the mark of a really good pastor to be able to pray a long prayer. In fact, if you were really good, you could "pray your people down" – meaning that you prayed so long that it wore them out and they just sat down from fatigue. Over time Presbyterians, reasonable people, knew they were going to get prayed down, so they quit standing up. Hence, today we sit for prayer. This prayer is short and it is simple. There is an address to God, an act of praise, and four to five requests. In its simplicity it shows a pattern of how we might pray.

3) Our Father

This is the address that tells us to whom the prayer is sent. In Luke it is brief – "Father." In Matthew, it is "our father, who art in heaven." Short or long, the address is to Father. That is very interesting because prayers to the Father were not very common in Judaism. In fact, thinking of God as Father was not common (see Isaiah 63:16). For the most part God was called God or the Lord. Many other images were used. Images like Rock, Fortress, and Shepherd. There were some exceptions – and I love Psalm 103:13 - "*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*"

I think the ministry of Compassion International is reclaiming the picture of Father. Jesus urged us to address our prayers to "Father." The New Testament is written in Greek, but the spoken language of the day was Aramaic. Most believe that Jesus used the word Abba here. You find that word in Galatians 4:6 – "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"

Abba is a very tender term – somewhat like our word Daddy or Papa. God is our Abba, not simply "like a father" – he IS a father.

So, many lack a good earthly father which can make calling God "Father" difficult. Some of your fathers were distant or absent. Some were cruel. Some fathers abused you in ways that have scarred your soul. I cannot begin to tell you the number of people with deep wounds caused by their fathers. The remedy for a bad father is not to avoid the word "Father", but to discover the good father. I want us to reclaim and rehabilitate the word "Father."

Fathers are a mess in our culture today. Think of how fathers have evolved on TV. I remember Robert Young in *Father Knows Best*. He was a great father. So was Fred MacMurray in *My Three Sons*. Think of Ben Cartwright in *Bonanza* or Bill Cosby. Those were commendable fathers. Today the most popular father on television is Homer Simpson, father of Bart. Fathers have garnered lots of negative attention. Jesus wants us to use better pictures for God.

As a youth I watched a man named Bill father his two sons. Bill was my senior youth leader – a volunteer parent. He had such compassion on his boys – even though they had their own troubles. I had the privilege of doing the wedding of one son years later and he chose his father to be his best man. I do not see that very often.

I remember the scene from the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona when the British runner Derek Redmond was running the 400 meter race. Coming around the last curve he tore his hamstring and fell to the ground. Derek jumped up and began hobbling toward the finish line. Suddenly, Jim Redmond was racing down the stairs at the stadium. He bounded over a 4 ? foot wall and onto the track. He grabbed his son, and told him “You don’t have to do this.” But Derek was determined to finish – and holding onto his father he finished the race. What a picture of “father”.

Even more than these – the address here is to God the Father.

Look at the Heidelberg Catechism – question 120

Q – Why has Christ commanded us to address God: “Our Father”?

A – That at the very beginning of our prayer he may awaken in us the childlike reverence and trust toward God which should be the motivation of our prayer, which is that God has become our Father through Christ and will much less deny us what we ask him in faith than our human fathers will refuse us earthly things.

Father – try to address God as Father – and let the Spirit rehabilitate that image.

4) Who Art in Heaven

This phrase is missing in Luke – but Matthew remembers that Jesus used it. This combines the intimate Father and immensity of God in the heavens. This suggests a Loving Father and Almighty God.

This is a Father so large that he created the Eagle Nebula which is six trillion miles long. This is a God so large that he created the oceans, and mountains, and magnificent animals. Our God is Big and Near - Immense and Intimate. Can you hold those pictures together?

5) Hallowed Be Thy Name

This is a request that the whole earth sets apart as holy the name of God. That not only means not taking God’s name in vain – through things like cursing, but it means not wasting God’s name through sloppiness. In this way it is not unlike the 2nd commandment from Exodus.

It also means praying that God’s reputation in the world may improve. (Dale Bruner, *The Christbook*, 298) Jesus once said, “If you have seen me you have seen the father” (John 14:9). Dale Bruner wrote, “Please make your real identity known so that we and others will recognize and honor you as you really are.” (Bruner, *The Christbook*, 299)

Notice that we are not really mentioned at all in this petition – it is about God. May the chief concern of our life be that God will reveal himself in glory! This means by our worship and by our work in the world we want to live in such a way that God’s name is appreciated more. There should be a type of work – a type of love – a type of encouragement – a type of demeanor that suggests we follow God. Someone said, “If you love God let your face know it.”

Application

1) Let's open our lives to prayer

2) Let's begin with a focus on God the Father.

Corrie Ten Boom, the great Dutch Christian, tells how she learned to trust God when she was in a German concentration camp because of the model of her father. As a child she would call out in the evening, "Papa, I'm ready for bed." Her father would come to her room and pray for her before she went to sleep. He would then place his hand gently on her face and say, "Sleep well, Corrie. I love you." She would remain very still because she wanted to feel the touch of his hand as she fell asleep. Years later in the concentration camp she remembered the feel of her father's hand on her face. When lying on a wretched dirty mattress she would say, "O Lord let me feel your hand upon me." This memory of her father's hand became imprinted with the hand of her Abba Father God and sustained her throughout her life, especially during those years in the concentration camps. May the Father's hand sustain us in our lives, as well.