

# “Father”: The Entry Point of All Prayer

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>1</sup> Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread, <sup>4</sup> and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.’” (Luke 11:1–4)

### “Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

- A. There are a couple of things I love about the disciples’ opening question here: “Lord, teach us to pray . . .” (v. 1).
1. One, it indicates to us that, in some way, there was something particularly compelling about the way Jesus prayed, something that when you heard it made you want to ask: “How do You do that? What is happening there? Can we learn this sort of connection You have with God? Can You teach us to pray?”
  2. But, two, it also indicates that even for these disciples/apostles, there was something confusing, something difficult, something complicated about prayer.
    - a. They, like us, need help with it.
- B. Do you feel that? I mean, really. How is your prayer life? Do you even have one? Do you even know what it’s supposed to be like? I don’t think I’m the only one who gets tripped up in this.
1. So I think we all should be right here, leaning in with these disciples here: “Lord, teach us to pray. We want to do it. We know we’re supposed to do it. But we don’t get it. Can You help? We want what You have.”

### “Father”

- A. Now in our text this morning we have the beginnings of Jesus’ response, His help, His teaching us to pray. And all I want to do today is focus in on that first word He gives us: “When you pray, say: ‘Father’” (v. 2a).
1. It is this idea of God as “Father” that, according to Jesus, is the entry point of all prayer. “Here,” He says, “is the place where true prayer starts.” Knowing God as a child does a Father should shape and inform all that prayer is.

B. So, if this idea is so essential, so fundamental, to Jesus' understanding of prayer, all I want to do today is slow us down and reflect with you on it. If God is to be known and experienced as "Father", what does that mean for our praying? How should this reality mark our prayer lives?

1. I've got six marks that follow from this idea. Let's get to work!

## Mark #1: Relationship

A. It seems to me that we often make prayer this strange, awkward kind of thing.

1. We get into strange postures—We close our eyes and bend our heads, we get on our knees, we put our hands together. I'm pretty sure my kids probably think God won't hear them if they don't clasp their hands because that's what we're always having them do (really this is just our ploy to keep them from being distracted or poking at each other).
2. We use strange words—Sometimes we might think, we can't pray if we don't have verses to quote or big fancy theological things to say. I can't just talk. Prayer is something else.
3. We use strange tones of voice—We have these prayer voices. We could be chatting over coffee or dinner with some people, and then, suddenly, when it's time to pray, it gets quiet, we all kind of settle in, and then when we go to pray, our tone has changed. Things get extra breathy, soft, and dramatic, or maybe really worked up and loud (depending on your style). But then when it's all done and we say the closing magic words—"Amen"—we go back to "normal". What just happened?
4. Sometimes when we pray, we follow outlines, or repeat things we've memorized. We use beads, or cards, or candles.
  - a. I'm reminded of the prayer we would say before dinner when I was growing up: "Bless us O Lord and these your gifts which we are about to receive from your bounty, through Christ our Lord, amen." I remember we would almost just race to say it to get to the food. If it was a casserole on the table or something, maybe I'd take my time, get contemplative. But if it was pizza or steak, I'd have that prayer done in a matter of milliseconds.

B. Now all of these various things—postures, words, tones, helps, etc.—can be fine when done with the right heart, but we have to be careful that, in all of this, we don't lose the fact that the very essence of prayer is relationship. It's a kid talking to his/her Father. That's the point Jesus is getting at here.

1. Returning to that prayer I'd recite around the dinner table. I would never talk this way in my other relationships. What do you think would happen if I talked to my wife like this? Can you imagine? My wife gets home from dinner with a friend or something. I really want to watch some TV or get back to my book, but I know I first have to "talk with her". It's just what I'm supposed to do. So I quickly recite something I memorized from a Christian husband blog online or whatever: "Honey, I'm so happy to see you, I hope you had a good time, I can't wait to hear about it, maybe tomorrow, xoxo. Amen." And I click the TV on.
  - a. I did my part, right? Wrong. I'd be sleeping on the couch if I approached my relationship with Megan like that. So why do we get used to approaching, God, our Father, like this? He is a Person, this is a relationship. He wants to talk.

- C. I remember this guy who was a part of the church I worked for back in SLO. I didn't know him all that well, but I will never forget the first time I heard him pray. Here's what made it so profound for me: He just talked. It didn't sound fancy, he kind of stumbled over his words, his eyes were open, and he just talked to God. And I found myself thinking: "He's breaking the rules. You can't pray like that. There needs to be reverence and solemnity and breath and all that other stuff."
1. But it was amazing. I mean, halfway through his prayer, I found myself opening my eyes just to make sure Jesus wasn't physically present in the room! It sounds like Jesus is actually here and this brother's chatting it up with Him.
    - a. Imagine that?! Praying as if Jesus is really in the room. Talking to Him. Talking to God like a kid would talk to His Dad.
- D. This is certainly the way that Jesus engaged God as His Father. I imagine the disciples like I did here back in [Luke 10:17-24](#).
1. Jesus is talking with them and then suddenly, as if seamlessly, He just begins talking to His Father in prayer. They're probably wondering: "Wait, is He talking to us still, or to someone else, I'm not tracking?"
    - a. But, you see, God is just another Person in the room, as it were. It's a relationship. We can talk to Him. That's the idea Jesus is after here. Our prayers should have this relational flavor to them. I'm a kid talking to my Dad. "When you pray, say: 'Father'" (v. 2a).

## Mark #2: Affection

- A. When we think of God as our "Father", another thing that should come to mind is the idea of Affection.
1. Now, I know, for many of us, affection is not what the word "Father" makes you think of. Your dad was absentee, abusive, cold. I was just talking to my friend the other day. He's a grown man but still struggling from the fact that his dad rarely, if ever, said "I love you." Physically, he was present. But emotionally, he was on the other side of the planet.
    - a. But when God invites us to call Him "Father", He's talking about Himself as Dad in the way the role was designed. He's talking about the affection He has for us. He loves you. He wants to talk with you. Let that sink in for moment.
- B. This affection of a Father for a child, no doubt, is what Jesus Himself enjoyed as God's Son. You remember the Father's declaration over Him at His baptism back in [Luke 3:21-22](#): " <sup>21</sup> [W]hen Jesus . . . had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'"
1. Now, I wonder if you realize, what God speaks over Jesus at His baptism is what He speaks over you at yours. We are immersed into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Through Christ we are adopted into this same family, and become objects of this same affection: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Can you believe the Father would say this over you?!

- a. The gospel is not that Jesus is the favorite Son and we, by grace, just get to be the little servant-kids that sleep out in the shed but can come in for a warm meal every now and then. No! The gospel is that all that Jesus enjoys as Son is shared and given to us! We have the Father’s heart, the Father’s love, the Father’s affection!
- C. But there is one more thing here worth mentioning. The Scriptures make plain that because God is our Father, He will love us and pursue us even when we are very opposite of lovely, even when we’ve been wayward and rebellious and sinful.
1. Listen to David soaring in song in [Psa 103:8-13](#): “<sup>8</sup> The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. <sup>9</sup> He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. <sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup> As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.”
    - a. Can you see the Father of the Prodigal running out to meet his wayward son? “[W]hile he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).
      - i. That’s the affection of a Father for a child. Understanding this, calling God “Father”, is the entry point of all prayer. He’s not put off by you. He’s not mad at you. He’s so glad you’re here!
- D. So prayer, then, is the place where we come in boldly and, quite frankly, let God love us back to life. Sometimes the idea of being loved seems so unbelievable, like such a fairytale to us, sometimes we are so aware of our junk and unworthiness, that we really struggle to let God love us.
1. But prayer as coming to your Father should help us here. You’re coming to your Dad, and He delights in and rejoices over you. Does He see your mess? Of course! More than you know! And He’ll deal with it in time. But it’s all within the context of a Father’s love.
    - a. And do you know what happens when you start to let this in? You start to grow more and more affectionate for Him. His love for you warms your heart with love for Him. Our prayers should have that kind of fireside quality to them. Our words should be glowing. “When you pray, say: ‘Father’” (v. 2a).

### Mark #3: Unrefinement

- A. Microsoft Word and Merriam-Webster say this isn’t a real word, but it should be. So we’re going to make it one. Approaching God as a kid would a Father means prayer should be marked, in some sense, by Unrefinement.

1. This mark, really builds off of the previous idea of Affection. For now that we realize that we are safe as we come to God in this relationship with Him, we can be unrefined, raw, real.
- B. Think about your other relationships for a moment.
1. Don't you have those relationships where you know you're really not safe? You have to keep performing, doing the song and dance, scratching their back, putting on your best face, or they're going to leave.
  2. But then you have those other relationships where you let it all hang out. They see the worst of you and you know they'll still be there by your side. You can take off the mask—there's blemishes and deformities under there, but they love you still.
    - a. This is the sort of thing we should have with God as affectionate Father. It's safe. You can come as you are. We can bring our real selves to a real God and find real help for our real needs.
- C. This idea of being unrefined, really is captured in the idea of being a kid isn't it? Does it get more unrefined than a child? I love it.
1. Here's what's beautiful about this: I don't have to guess what Levi is feeling. He makes it plain. When I bring some food to his mouth that he is not into, he has all sorts of ways of letting me know what he feels about it.
    - a. He wrenches his mouth shut to where it would take pliers to get the food through. His little arm whips out with surprising force and knocks the spoon out of my hand. Or he just simply says: "No." Either way. I know how he feels about it, right? His heart is right out in the open.
- D. Let me encourage you to engage with God in what I would call "Toddler-Talk". What I mean is, in prayer, share your real, unrefined stuff with Him. Stop trying to be civilized. Stop trying to be put together. Just be a kid talking to your Dad.
1. As adults, so many of us have learned how to disguise what we're really feeling and thinking. We learn how to use words to hide or manipulate or cover our guilt and shame. We do this in relationship with one another and we do it in relationship with God. We feel like we should probably clean ourselves up before coming to Him, but really what He's saying here is: "Bring the junk. I can handle it."
- E. In the gospels, the people that come with their mess to Jesus, are never the ones that get rebuked or turned away. Have you noticed this?
1. Instead the ones that get turned away are those who refuse to come as unrefined kids, those who are too "mature" to cry out for God's help. People like the Pharisees. They've learned how to present something externally that's not what's really true of them inside. There's a gap between their true hearts and their projected image. That's why Jesus refers to them as "[hypocrites](#)" or "[whitewashed tombs](#)" (cf. [Matt 23:27](#)).

- a. They're the opposite of what we're after here. Toddler-Talk. Unrefined Toddler-Talk. God can't help us if we won't bring our real stuff to Him.
- F. As a Son of His Father, Jesus knew this. Consider again, that text I reference often in [Heb 5:7](#) concerning Jesus' prayer life: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."
  - 1. In that messiness, there was reverence. This is amazing when you think about it. Often we think reverence is the idea of quiet, austere, composed. But here reverence looks like loud cries and tears. How can this be?
    - a. There's actually more faith in bringing the junk to God, do you see that? Because it shows confidence that He can help where we feel helpless, confused, lost. He will care for us.
      - i. When we clean up first, it looks like kindness, faithfulness but it is the utmost disrespect. It says we can take care of our problems and sin and struggles, we don't want to burden you with those, we've got them. That runs precisely counter to the movement of the gospel.

## Mark #4: Dependence

- A. This mark is related to the previous, obviously, but, again, it continues to build. Coming to God with our mess, with our raw sewage, with our heart tangled in knots—bringing that to Him shows not just an awareness of our security with Him as our Father, it also shows an awareness of our need, our dependence on Him. We have finally given up on the charade of self-sufficiency and are willing to say: "Help . . . I need You!"
- B. This one's going to be hard for us. We don't like to feel like we can't do it.
  - 1. We traveled across the country for a family reunion this past week and I was given quite an illustration of this while we were making our way through the airport. You've seen those moving sidewalks right? Well, for the exhausted parent of 3 little kids, they are a godsend. We can stop. We can get help! As we were enjoying a ride on one of these getting to our connection in Chicago O'Hare (a massive airport), I noticed a few people off to the side, preferring to walk on their own. They were using all of their effort and still going slower than us as we stood on this belt. And, I thought: "Why? Why would you not hop on and catch a ride?"
    - a. Now, I don't know their motive, but I couldn't help but see a connection at this point. We don't like help. We want to do it on our own. We don't want to feel dependent upon anyone or anything. "I can do this myself thank you."
      - i. Such an attitude will utterly dismantle your prayer life. Prayer to God as Father, is fundamentally an expression that I am a child, and I need help.

- C. This is precisely the sort of thing Jesus exemplifies for us perfectly. This is what He means when He says things like:
1. “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:19).
  2. “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30).
  3. “<sup>28</sup> I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. <sup>29</sup> And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:28–29).
    - a. Paul Miller, reflecting on verses like these, makes this stunning observation: “When Jesus tells us to become like little children, he isn’t telling us to do anything he isn’t already doing. Jesus is, without question, the most dependent human being who ever lived. Because he can’t do life on his own, he prays. And he prays. And he prays” (A Praying Life, p. 45).
- D. We are dependent on God for everything. Prayer is an expression of that dependence. We talk to Him about our day, what should I say, what should I do? We talk to Him about our fears, about our temptations, about our desires, about our jealousies. We thank Him for food and breath and life and everything. “When you pray, say: ‘Father’” (v. 2a).

## Mark #5: Hope

- A. What we see with this mark is that, when we know God as Father, in our prayers, we are not merely going to express our dependence, we’re also going to expect His provision.
1. Kids know how to dream, how to hope. They don’t overthink and overanalyze. They haven’t learned pessimism or cynicism yet. They enjoy their Father’s care and hope in His provision. They’re not worried about where the food is going to come from, who’s going to pay the bills, the ins and outs of the daily grind. They have this fundamental conviction, really, that Dad is going to take care of them.
- B. Often, over time, when it comes to prayer, we lose this, right? No one wants to talk about it, but often we kind of wonder if prayer really does anything at all. We say we’ll pray for people and maybe we mean well, but we never get around to it. We’ve tried this before and nothing seems to change.
1. To quote Paul Miller once more: “Many Christians give in to a quiet cynicism that leaves us unknowingly paralyzed. We see the world as monolithic, frozen. To ask God for change confronts us with our doubt about whether prayer makes any difference. Is change even possible? Doesn’t God control everything? If so, what’s the point? . . .  
 Many Christians haven’t stopped believing in God, we have just become functional deists, living with God at a distance. . . . But as we learn to pray well, we’ll discover that this is my Father’s world. Because my Father controls everything, I can ask, and he will listen and act. Since I am his child, change is possible—and hope is born” (Miller, pp. 22-23).

- C. This is the sort of thing we see with David in [Psa 5:1-3](#): “<sup>1</sup> Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my groaning. <sup>2</sup> Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray. <sup>3</sup> O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning [I direct my prayer to you] and watch.”
1. We know that God hears us. We anticipate, we are looking for His response. “I don’t know how He’s going to answer, but I know He will.”
- D. This is certainly the sort of thing Jesus enjoyed with His Father. It wasn’t a naïve hope—He knew it would be hard. He knew sometimes His Father’s answer would be, “No.” But He knew that His Father ultimately would vindicate and provide for Him.
1. This is the sort of thing He’s referring to in [John 16:32](#) when He tells His disciples: “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.”
    - a. You all are going to bail on Me, but My Father will get me through. And, in the resurrection, He does!

## Mark #6: Grace

- A. And this really leads us to the last thing we should say. When we come to know God as Father, we come to see that prayer is all of Grace.
1. Why do we have this relationship with Him? Why is He well-pleased with us and affectionate for us? Why does He invite us to come unrefined as we are and depend on Him for everything? Why do we have hope of the Father’s care at all? We are sinners. We all have gone astray, turned from God, rebelled against Him. We don’t deserve His love. We deserve His wrath.
- B. For every mark here I have tried to show you how it’s Jesus who really fulfills and exemplifies these ideas for us. He’s the true Son of God. He’s the One who rightly has the Father’s affection. He’s the One who lived in perfect communion with the Father and hoped in Him to the end.
1. And yet, He’s the One whom God crushed on that cross, in judgment against our sin. Jesus was temporarily cut from all lines of communication, disinherited, rejected, abandoned, the wrath of God poured out on Him for our negligence and sin, so that the lines could be opened back up for us.
- C. “<sup>4</sup> [W]hen the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” ([Gal 4:4–6](#)).
1. “When you pray, say: ‘Father’” (v. 2a). It’s all of grace!