

Talking to Our Father

Day 1:

It's dangerously easy to approach prayer with the wrong mindset. We can easily assume it's all about getting what we want or controlling our situations. It's almost like God is a happiness vending machine or something. That's backwards. In the first few months of His ministry, Jesus laid out a life-changing model for prayer. Matthew 6:9-13 contains the most popular prayer on the planet. We call it the Lord's Prayer. This prayer challenges all our preconceived notions about talking to God.

The disciples wanted practical advice about connecting with God. They asked Jesus, "*teach us how to pray.*" The Lord's Prayer was the answer to that important question. Jesus didn't give this prayer as a script. On the contrary, He wanted these words to be a model for daily prayer. It's not a prescription; it's an inspiration. The Lord's prayer is not a formula; it's a framework. Every sentence shows us the heart of honest and effective prayer.

"*Our father...*" It's just two words, but this line is packed with power. Jesus encouraged us to pray to God like we would talk to our own parent. Just like I'd call my mother for guidance, we should come to God for parental guidance. While the address "God the Father" seems second nature in Christian culture, this concept was groundbreaking in the early first century. God was seldom addressed as a parent in the Old Testament traditions. With these two words, Jesus presented a new paradigm in prayer. We aren't just servants of God; we are sons and daughters of God.

I understand that the word "father" carries a lot of baggage. It's foolish to assume that everyone has a father figure who can hold a "world's best dad" mug without any irony. Maybe your father was overly harsh. Maybe your dad never understood you. Maybe your father wasn't even there in the first place. Your parents are human, which means that they have inevitably let you down, maybe in bigger ways than you'd like to admit. Which is why Jesus attaches God's identity as a father to His sovereignty in heaven. "Our Father in heaven" means that God is both personally involved in your life and powerfully in control over the whole universe. God is personal, powerful, and perfect. He's a good dad. He's the perfect dad.

When you pray, speak personally. Discuss life with God the same way you would on a phone call with your parent. Whether your problems are massive or minuscule, you can bring them to God. He's got the whole world in His hands, but he can hold your hand at the same time.

Day 2:

When Jesus taught us how to pray, the first line says, *'Hallowed be [God's] name'* (Matthew 6:9). A crucial ingredient of effective prayer is embracing God's position of power. You have probably never said the word "hallowed" outside a church service or funeral. It's an old school religious word that simply translates to "Holy," which means "to separate; to cut." When we say that God is hallowed, we are saying that He is separate, superior, and supreme. God is on a different level. He's personal because He's our Father. He's powerful because He's the God of the entire universe.

God's Hallowed nature helps us put our problems into perspective. What frightens you does not frighten God. What frustrates you does not frustrate God. What's impossible for you is possible for God.

If a giant blue Genie were to appear to you right now, what would you wish for? People would likely ask for endless money, the ability to talk to dogs, the perfect breakfast burrito, or a few thousand bonus wishes. At least that's where my mind would go. When confronted with the Genie question, it forces us to realize something unsettling.

We are pretty selfish. Most of us would make wishes that directly benefit our own lives.

When Jesus is teaching us the key ingredients to effective prayer, he states, "your will be done." We shouldn't exclusively pray for our own will. We should pray for God's will for the world. We must refuse to approach God like a Genie with selfish wishes and reckless requests. Don't only pray for your desires; pray for God to align your desires with His will. Don't just pray for your concerns; pray for God's Kingdom.

God's will is way better than your wants. His plans are better than your plans. You wouldn't go to the doctor to tell her your diagnosis when she's the expert. You wouldn't go to a Harvard professor to teach him about string theory when he wrote the book (whereas you watched a YouTube video). God is the leading expert of human experience. He envisioned it, then invented it. God knows what you need far better than you do, so ensure your prayers start with surrender.

There is nothing wrong with asking God for your desires but approach the conversation with submission. Whenever you pray, be sure to pray for God's will to be done around you and through you. When you do so, you invite God to change and rearrange your desires to line up with His. Prayer changes things -- that thing is usually you.

Day 3:

The Lord's Prayer is the most memorized prayer in the entire world. Billions of churchgoers recite this passage every single Sunday. These verses have all of the things you'd expect from a conventional call to prayer -- submission, forgiveness, adoration, and bread. You heard that right; there is a shoutout to everyone's favorite carb. What's up with that? Does Jesus really want us to ask God for bread every time we pray? Not exactly.

In ancient Judea, bread was not an indulgence. It was the ultimate source of nourishment. People didn't count carbs back then. "Bring on the bread" was undoubtedly a common phrase at mealtime because it provided the sustenance and nutrients essential for living well and working hard. A big stack of bread was the centerpiece at every single meal in Jewish households. It wasn't a snack; it was their primary source of energy.

When Jesus asked God to give us our daily bread, food wasn't the main message. This isn't about a pita; it's about provision. The ancient Jews saw bread as a symbol of God's consistent provision and protection. It served as a reminder that God's got their backs. The presence of bread on the table meant that God blessed their harvest that year. Additionally, the mention of bread made them think back to when God rescued their people with "bread from heaven" while wandering around the wilderness (Exodus 16:4-21).

The Lord's Prayer encourages us to pray for provision every single day. We don't say, "give us this day a year's supply of bread" or "give us this day unlimited breadsticks from the Olive Garden." Instead, we pray for daily bread. Don't pray for indulgence. Pray for sustenance.

What kind of sustaining provision do you need today? Is it patience because you feel like there's a target on your back? Is it peace of mind because worries kept you up all night? Is it clarity of thought because you cannot make sense of an upcoming decision? Whatever you need, ask for it. God will give you a breadbasket of blessings designed to get you through the day.

Day 4:

Lying is wrong, but I am sure you know this. This belief is not reserved for the religious either. Almost every person on our planet agrees that it's bad to bear false witness. While we all strive to live a life free of lies, I am sure we've all let a fib slip at one point. We've lied to our parents, we've lied to our friends, and we've lied to God during church.

I hear you saying, "That's a bold accusation there, buddy. It's one thing to lie about who put the empty jug of milk back in the refrigerator, but to lie to God in His own house? I would never!" Sadly, I know that I have, and it's possible that you have too. Our church lie usually happens when reciting the Lord's Prayer. Jesus encourages us to pray a promise to God. The model prayer says, "*forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us*" (Matthew 6:12 NLT). I remember saying this prayer while simultaneously holding a grudge. My refusal to forgive turned me into a liar -- not to a friend or teacher, but to God.

Can you honestly recite this part of the prayer without your fingers crossed? Can you claim that you have forgiven those who have sinned against you? It's an important question for reflection. I believe that Jesus intentionally positions our own forgiveness from God in front of our forgiveness for others. The fact that God has forgiven us should empower us to do the same for others. We are fully forgiven, so we should freely forgive.

According to Jesus, your daily prayers should include two critical elements -- confession and restoration. First, confess your sins before our forgiving God. When you pray, ask for forgiveness. You owed a disastrous debt to God, but He wiped it clean. Through Jesus, God shredded your impossible-to-repay invoice. Your confession is a celebration of that life-changing fact. Your sin was too much to carry, but Jesus took it on for you. Confess, not out of obligation, but out of celebration.

Second, give forgiveness to others. If there is any bitterness in your heart, ask God to help you remove it. Seek to restore and repair damaged relationships with the healing power of forgiveness. People have incorrectly assumed this passage means that our forgiveness from God is conditional on our forgiveness of others. That's not what Jesus says here. He says "forgive as you have been forgiven." It's not a condition of forgiveness. It's an expression of forgiveness. A person who withholds forgiveness has not come to terms with the universe-shifting reality of God's mercy. Whenever you pray, do so with confession and restoration.

Day 5:

I am sure you've seen a scary movie or two in your lifetime. I don't get it, but people love these things. There is a whole genre of film that focuses on the topics of demons, angels, hauntings, spirits, spooky dolls, and killer clowns. Eager movie-goers grab their popcorn to watch these movies with buttery fingers covering their eyes. The public loves these films because they know it's all fake. It's a rush to get scared when you're not in any real danger. After watching a movie called the Blair Witch in High school, I never wanted to see another scary movie again. It freaked me out!

The unfortunate reality is that evil is real, and it can be dangerous for you. When Jesus closes the Lord's Prayer, He speaks to our need for protection from spiritual attacks. Jesus says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." We are in a spiritual war. It doesn't look like a conventional battle or a scene from a horror movie. It's not scary; it's sneaky. It doesn't look like levitating tables and demon dolls. It looks like an overwhelming urge to stray from God's path for your life. The "evil one" uses temptation to prevent us from experiencing all God has for us

This closing is a direct mirror of the standard prayer that Jewish parents would pray with their kids in the morning. Together, the family would pray, "Bring me not into the power of sin, And not into the power of guilt, And not into the power of temptation, And not into the power of anything shameful."

We must realize the fact that we are fighting a spiritual war on a daily basis. When the sun rises, a new battle begins. Pray with that reality in mind. The Lord's Prayer teaches that we must rely on God for both physical sustenance and spiritual safety. Every day, pray for God to deliver you. Temptation will come, so ask God to strengthen you. Accusation is inevitable, so ask God for assurance. The enemy's attacks are persistent, but they're puny compared to God's power. Pray in that power. Going into your day without prayer is like going into war without a weapon.