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**Title:** Teach Us to Pray: Our Father

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**Scripture:** [Mark 14:32-36](#)

**Text:** [Romans 8:15c-17, 26-27](#)

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Repeat after me. "Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Stop there. Don't go on, even though it is hard to stop. That's all we are going to look at today and honestly, that's more than enough, more than we probably should take on. Today, we start a series titled Teach us to Pray and with it, we are going to do something dangerous. Over the next six weeks, we are going to look carefully at

something that is so familiar, so well-known, that to take it apart is risky. Why? Because we all have lots of feelings and experiences with this prayer.

For just a moment, think about where you have prayed the Lord's Prayer. Besides weekly worship, where have you, or do you pray the Lord's Prayer? I know a lot of your answers because, I've asked around: at the birth of children, at the bedsides of dying family, in the depths of loneliness, on mountain top retreat, on airplanes when you fear crashing, at AA meetings, in combat, at a funeral, at my baptism, at our wedding. It is a familiar companion of faith and is prayed anywhere and everywhere.

Think about this. Right now, The Lord's Prayer is being prayed, all over the world. Likely, there is never a minute when it isn't being prayed, in countless languages and even more settings. Over the last 2000 years, there are probably no words that have been said more than The Lord's Prayer. And likely, it was never meant to be prayed over and over again. Jesus shared it with his disciples as a template for prayer.

The disciples, noting that Jesus' prayer life was at the center of his spirituality, observed how empowering and renewing it was, how it transformed Jesus, and the disciples said, "Wow, we need that. We want that; we want what he has." So, one time, after Jesus finished praying they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." And what we recite now is what Jesus taught them. It was an example, an illustration, a form for prayer. Jesus may be shocked that we took his teaching moment and turned it into the perfect prayer, the prayer that is said over and over again.

Taking it apart and analyzing it may be more in keeping with its original purpose. At the very least, it will allow us to think about how Jesus thought about prayer. But hopefully we will discover and unleash its power to transform your life when living

the Lord's Prayer, not just praying it. Let's go back to the beginning and see what Jesus was teaching us. Again, repeat after me. Ready. "Our."

A second person plural pronoun starts the prayer and because of its place, we never think about what it means. Yet, it may be one of the most revolutionary words in the prayer. Look around the room and say it again, "Our." Our prayer is a communal prayer. It's not your prayer. Jesus doesn't begin it possessively with "my." Jesus uses "our" and the power of that is self-evident even though we seldom stop to truly appreciate it. Do you hear what Jesus is doing?

Jesus had an intimate relationship with God by his birth right. He is born of the Father. He is the Promised One of Israel; he is Immanuel, God with us. He is the very nature and essence of God. While God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God is Jesus' "dad." By using the pronoun our, he is inviting his disciples into his relationship, he is inviting them into his home. He is meeting us at the door of life, saying, "Come in and meet my father." But, more importantly, he is saying, "Come in and meet our father." Jesus is essentially saying, "My father is your father is our father."

This didn't happen by accident. It was God's plan. Paul describes it in Galatians saying, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son...so that we might receive adoption as children... because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father'" (Galatians 4:4-6) This whole thing between us and God was God's idea before it was ours.

You get to pray the word "our" because you are adopted into the family and everyone around you is too. But not just everyone around you, but all of God's adopted sons and daughters who may not look like you or act like you or even think like you. For that matter, it's not just those today but those who have gone before us and those who will come after us. All of that is reflected in this little inclusive and powerful word, "our." It not our decision but God's decision, God's choice in the amazing grace offer through Jesus. We are family, "...joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17b) "To be a Christian is therefore to be the beneficiary of a two thousand year inheritance which none of us paid for, earned and much less deserved."<sup>1</sup>

So, repeat after me and feel the power of it, "Our." Now again, "Our Abba! Father." You just heard that through our adoption as children, the Holy Spirit cries through us, "Abba! Father." Scholars alike believe that Jesus, who taught in his native language of Aramaic would have simply said, "Abba!" We can see this when Jesus himself, offers up the first Lord's Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Mark tells us that Jesus fell to his knees and said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." (Mark 14:36) Jesus' sense of God was so close, so real, and so intimate that he never prayed without addressing God as Abba. His relationship with God was always expressed from a father-son relationship. Abba, father.

The very first words that a Jewish child learned in Aramaic is Abba (which means "daddy") and Imma (which means "mommy"). The word Abba is so personal and so familiar a term that no one ever used it to address God— until Jesus did. It has

been pointed out that there is not a single example of the use of Abba to address God in the whole of Jewish literature. Jesus' utter intimacy with God is startling. Just think about it: The God of creation; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of Sarah, Leah, and Rachel; the God of heaven and earth— is Abba, Father!<sup>2</sup>

"In the Old Testament, God is addressed as Father only seven times. In every case, it is the entire nation of Israel speaking to God that way. As far as we know, there was never a time when Abraham or Moses or David or Daniel went to the quietness of their room, fell on their knees, and dared to speak to God that way."<sup>3</sup> Closeness, intimacy and love, which one felt and expressed with one's "daddy" was not the metaphor that was used to address God. Jesus expands how to address God based upon his relationship as the Son. But in doing so, Jesus also understood that to picture God is all but impossible.

I love the story of the little girl in Sunday School working hard on a drawing. The teacher asked her what she was doing. The little girl said she was drawing a picture of God. The teacher told her that no one knows what God looks like. Confidently the girl replied, "They will when I am done." Even though we may think the picture we have in our head of God is right, all pictures are simply an attempt to create a metaphor of God even though that is truly impossible. Even God says it is impossible, telling Isaiah, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

The Bible reflects the period in which it was written. The biblical metaphors for God of "King," and "Lord" were used in a time when the male-dominated monarchy was the keystone of political order. And just as those metaphors are shaped by the time in which they were created, so too is the metaphor of Abba, Father. To say that God is Father conveys entirely different meanings in today world. For some, this can be challenging and there is good reason.

Some of us have wonderful memories of childhood and our father. I put myself in this category. But for others, fatherhood is a painful thought. Your dad wasn't very good and you live with the scars of that. Father wounds are real. For still others, it wasn't that your dad was bad or good; he was simply gone, absent. Sometimes this was due to abandonment; other times because of the tragedy of death. To use father as your metaphor for God can be painful if not impossible.

Jesus certainly would not want someone to use painful language in addressing God. That wasn't his intent. Rather, Jesus uses father to indicate intimacy and closeness to God. He wants us to experience the same intimacy with God that he had. He wants us to know that we can talk about any and everything like we would with a loving, caring parent. When saying "Abba, Father" we are encouraged to picture crawling into God's lap and receiving God's love, comfort, healing, and strength. We can laugh and weep freely and openly in the arms of Abba, our Father God.

Or, to expand the metaphor, we can be hugged by a caring and comforting Imma, our Mother God.<sup>4</sup> Jesus would be okay with that because he is teaching us to use a word for God that draws you into intimacy and closeness with God. He is using a new metaphor rather than drawing a definitive picture which is impossible.

So, repeat after me and feel the intimacy that Jesus wants us to experience. "Our Father." Now again, "In heaven." When I was teaching a Bible study earlier in the week, someone asked, "What happened to "art?" Have I been saying in wrong? No, the version of the prayer, which has been handed down for centuries is shaped by the old King James Version from whence comes the "art, thys and thine." The newer translations are simply "in heaven."

Pause and let "in heaven" sink in. Again, think about Jesus using this prayer to teach us how to prayer. Just as he has established this close and intimate relationship, Jesus sets up some clear distance as well. God is near and yet far away, in heaven. Drawn in as daughters and sons of God, Jesus now points to the eternal nature of this God of ours. Our God is by our side yet dwelling on high. Our God is holding our hands, yet ruler of the universe.

It is important to address. God is placed, located, in heaven which means He is the one who rules the cosmos. God is Lord of all God has made. Any less of a god wouldn't do us any good. If God is not the creator of heaven and earth, of all there is, was and will be, there would be no reason to call up God's name. Our prayers wouldn't matter. Prayer would be simply self-therapy because there isn't any power behind them. When we pray to our father in heaven, we are so bold to make extravagant requests because we pray to the One who rules, who is "God the Father, Almighty, creator of heaven and earth."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, when we say 'in heaven' we expand our understanding of "our" to include all the saints who have gone before us. We never pray alone because, "we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) Heaven, according to the vision in the book of Revelation, is a crowded, noisy place. Not only are the angels in heaven praising God, there are also the saints who have died in the faith and now rejoice full time in heaven. "They are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night." (Revelation 7:15) Think of that. When you pray "Our father, in heaven", the voices of the saints join you in your prayer. Peter, Paul, Augustine, St. Francis, Martin Luther, Calvin, Campbell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa, your loved ones who have gone before, who taught you the Lord's Prayer, who said the prayer with you. Right now. Imagine that. See them as you repeat again after me. "Our Father, in heaven." Now again, repeat after me. "Hallowed be your name."

God has a name but it's not, as the old joke goes, Harold. "Our Father in heaven, Harold be your name." It's not even Hal. God's name is hallowed, holy. When we talk to the God we are to say, "Father, hallowed be your name."

In the near East, names have a great deal of significance. When a parent names his child, he doesn't name the child after a rich Aunt or wonder if the initials will look good on the luggage or whether the first name rhymes with the last name. Usually a child is named after a certain virtue with the hope that the child will grow up to the name. Jesus is suggesting the same.

When we pray, "Hallowed be thy name," we are speaking about God's character, and we are asking that in our lives God will be God to us. God will be holy, hallowed, revered and sacred. We will not try to whittle God down to size. We will

not try to manipulate God. God's name will be honored in the way we use God's name, the way we pray and the way we live. <sup>6</sup>

Sometimes, maybe more than sometimes, we misuse God's name, and do not make it holy. I'm not just meaning taking it "in vain" which is against the commandment and far too common and terrible in its own right. But also, when we assume God that is on our side of things, when we use God's name to rubber stamp our causes, to bless our personal or political interests, some of which clearly self-centered and against God's plan.

Sometimes, maybe more than sometimes, when I listen to our prayers, we don't honor God. We pray as though God were deaf or slow or has to be manipulated to come to our aid.

Sometimes, no often, in the way we live our lives, we do not make holy God's name. To pray "hallowed be your name" is to accept the responsibility to honor God's name in all that we do and say. It is a transformative statement that begins the process of being set aside, sanctified and made holy yourself, becoming the "chosen race, royal priesthood...God's own people" and live into "his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) Maybe you don't see this but it as the intent of the prayer but to pray "hallowed be your name" is to join the chorus of all creation in praising God's holiness. It is a statement of commitment to honor and praise God's name with our lives, not just in a weekly prayer said at the beginning of worship.

You can see now, why I suggested that there was much in this first short phrase, maybe more than we should tackle in one morning. In this template of prayer that Jesus gave when asked by a disciple,

Teach us to pray", there is power, a power that we can unleash in our lives if we don't just pray it, but begin living it. Just today, it is about inheritance, intimacy, eternity and holiness. Did you ever imagine?

Then together, one last time, imagine as you repeat after me,

"Our"

"Father"

"In heaven"

"Hallowed be your name."

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<sup>1</sup> Lord, Teach us. Willimon and Hauerwas. Abingdon. 1995, page 27.

<sup>2</sup> Stroman, Dr John A. Pray in This Way: Sermons on the Lord's Prayer (Protestant Pulpit Exchange Series) (Kindle Locations 215-219). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, Haddon. The Disciple's Prayer, Retrieved by subscription @ preachingtoday.com Stroman, 219-221.

<sup>4</sup> Stroman, 222.

<sup>5</sup> Apostles' Creed.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson.