

Sunday April 19, 2020

“This Then Is How We Pray” Prayer as Jesus Taught Us

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” “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. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.’” Luke 11:1 and Matthew 6:9-13

One prayer, two settings

MONDAY 4/20/2020 Matthew 6:5-15, Luke 11:1-4

The fact that Luke and Matthew reported Jesus giving the Lord’s Prayer in different settings suggests that Jesus taught this prayer to his followers often, not just one time. (Many scholars believe that was the case with most of the material we call “The Sermon on the Mount.”) Jesus didn’t mean the Lord’s Prayer to be a museum piece, framed and placed on a mantel or in a display case. It was Jesus teaching God’s people, through his disciples, how to pray. That’s why at Resurrection we pray this prayer every week in worship.

- The Lord’s Prayer concisely covered a wide range of topics, from the lofty (“Bring in your kingdom”) to the everyday (“Give us the bread we need for today”). It was a model prayer God’s people could weave into their lives. Are there subjects or wishes you tend to avoid praying about, for fear God isn’t interested or that God might disapprove of your concern? How secure are you in talking to God in prayer about everything that matters to you?
- Jesus’ picture of people who hope their prayers will be heard because they “pour out a flood of empty words” might recall the bizarre, tragic “prayers” of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (cf. 1 Kings 18:26-29). They saw their god(s) as inattentive, aloof, needing to be “won over.” How have you learned to trust that God wants to hear you, that you don’t need to impress God with big words or long speeches?

Prayer: Dear God, help me never to be too busy, or too shy, to ask you both the big and little questions that are on my mind. Thank you for the ongoing conversation we call “prayer.” Amen.

OUR Father

TUESDAY 4/21/2020 John 17:11, 13-21; Ephesians 4:1-6

Jesus phrased the Lord’s Prayer using plural pronouns—our Father, our daily bread, and so on. Although we pray about specific, personal concerns, by beginning the prayer with “Our Father” Jesus reminded us that, beyond our surface differences, we humans are all part of the same family. We do not make our faith journey alone, but in company with one another.

- Just hours before he went to the cross, John said, Jesus prayed forcefully for his followers to be one. “Holy Father, watch over them in your name...that they will be one just as we are one.... I pray

they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” In a world that tends to focus on our differences, how can you better open your heart to let the Holy Spirit create the type of supernatural oneness with other believers for which Jesus prayed? Ø We aren’t “one” because we’re “nice.” We’re one because the one God is our Father. “Speakers used repetition to drive home a point; Paul repeats various forms of the Greek term translated “one” seven times in vv. 4-6, and four uses of “all” (three after varied prepositions) in v. 6.”

* How easy or hard is it for you to live out Ephesians’ claim that you share “one faith” with people who worship differently than you, baptize differently, or read the Bible differently?

Prayer: Loving Jesus, guide your people all over the earth. Guide me. Help me to live so that words like “peace,” “unity,” “humility” and “love” will be the main qualities others see in me. Amen.

* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture (Kindle Locations 268348-268350). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Our FATHER

WEDNESDAY 4/22/2020 Luke 11:11-12, 13:33-35

Jesus often called God “Father.” He didn’t do that to say that God is male rather than female. “With nearly a thousand uses of the explicit vocabulary of fatherhood in English translations, the image of the father is a major biblical archetype. Yet we should note...that we find no extended teaching about being a human father.... Against this backdrop of the failure of fathers stands the image of God the Father, who exemplifies all those characteristics that the flesh-and-blood fathers lack.”

* For Jesus, “father” was a way to express God’s caring and reliability, a quality for which he also used the feminine image of a mother hen.’

- Jesus followed the Hebrew Scriptures in crediting God with the very best, most reliable traits of fathers AND mothers. Hosea 11:1-4 movingly pictured God as a loving father helping an infant learn to walk. Isaiah 49:14-15 said God cared for God’s children even more intently than a nursing mother. Genesis 1:26-27’s archetypal creation story said male and female alike bear God’s image. How did Jesus’ “father” image point toward good qualities all humans can depend on from God, not toward our gender differences?
- Were both of your parents equally nurturing and trustworthy? If not, which of them had more of the qualities that made you feel safe and cared for? In what ways can taking your needs, hurts and concerns to the heavenly parent to whom Jesus addressed the Lord’s Prayer help you to grow beyond any painful gaps in the human parenting you received?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your prayer said I can trust God’s goodness. You said God’s house has plenty of room (John 14:2), that he runs to welcome me home when I stray (Luke 15:20). Thank you for showing me what a loving heavenly father I have. Amen.

* Ryken, L., Wilhoit, J., Longman, T., Duriez, C., Penney, D., & Reid, D. G. Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (electronic ed.) Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, pp. 273-275.

“Abba”

THURSDAY 4/23/2020 Mark 14:35-36, Romans 8:14-17

Very few of us know the Aramaic language. In prayer, both Jesus and Paul used one Aramaic word so unique that most English translations retain its Aramaic form: abba. Abba was “a respectful but intimate way to address one’s father. Although a few parables in much later sources compare God with an “abba,” it does not appear in Jewish prayers (unlike “Father”). To our knowledge, this way of directly addressing God seems to have been unique to Jesus (until adopted by his followers; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).” *

- Some Christians, chiefly those raised in liturgical churches or on the stately 1611 English of the King James Version of the Bible, see highly formal speech as vital to prayer. (Of course, the King James Version’s English was not stiffly formal in its day— Shakespeare used it in his popular plays.) How does Jesus’ use of an intimate (though respectful) family term to address God challenge the idea that we must be rigidly formal when we pray?

- On the other hand, learning about abba leads others to move toward a type of “Hey, dude” informality in their prayers. At times that approach loses any sense of awe or respect and begins to treat God as just “one of the gang.” How can you develop an “abba” type of prayer closeness and trust with God that respects him as Creator and Lord, not just a “pal”?

Prayer: Dear God, you are my Creator and Lord, always worthy of awe and respect. You are also my abba, loving, caring—and worthy of trust because you are Creator and Lord. Teach me how to live always confident that you are “for” me. Amen.

* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture (Kindle Locations 227320-227323). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Who is in heaven

FRIDAY 4/24/2020 Psalm 139:7-12, Acts 17:24-28

This phrase of the Lord’s Prayer translated the Greek word ouranos. We typically think of “heaven” as an unspecified location, usually “far, far away” like the galaxy in which Star Wars claimed to have taken place. But ouranos also meant “air,” or “atmosphere.” God is greater than our one little world, but God is also as close to us as the air we breathe, not separated from us by vast galactic distances.

- Christians don’t just believe ideas—we believe in Someone. The Hebrew psalmist and the apostle Paul, speaking to philosophers in Athens centuries later, described the kind of personal God they believed in and trusted. What helps you to place your faith and trust in God’s life-giving, loving person, not just a vague, abstract force?

- Paul went on to tell the Athenians, “We have no need to imagine that the divine being is like a gold, silver, or stone image made by human skill and thought” (Acts 17:29).

Few in today’s first world cultures specifically worship gold, silver or stone images. But more broadly, many of us are tugged to give a life priority to lots of gold, silver or stone objects (as well as

many other materials). What helps you maintain a focus on the God who “isn’t far away from any of us”? In what ways does God’s presence make your life better?

Prayer: O God, I believe in and trust you as a personal being who loves me and my world. Help me live and act in ways that show that your love has touched my life. Amen.

“The holiness of your name”

SATURDAY 4/25/2020 Exodus 3:13-15, 20:7; Psalm 115:1

From a burning bush, God called to Moses, and told him to go to Egypt. Moses had grown up in Egypt, and he knew that like most ancient peoples, the Egyptians believed in many “gods.” So his initial question—“What’s this God’s name?”—had a “Which one of the many are you?” ring. But God’s reply (“I Am Who I Am”—Hebrew YHWH) said he was the only God, the sole reason that (as philosophers might say) there is “something instead of nothing.” The third commandment warned against using God’s holy name (especially the personal divine name revealed to Moses) in any trivial, profane or false ways. And the Hebrew poet of Psalm 115 prayed to resist the urge to seek glory for his own name or that of his people, instead wishing to bring glory to God’s great name.

- Are there any ways that you could alter your speech habits to avoid misusing or misrepresenting God’s name? (Note that while this question can include “cussing” or careless common expressions that include God’s name, it goes much deeper than that.) What about your actions—are they contributing to God’s good reputation? What are some thoughts or occasions that tempt you to glorify your own name, rather than God’s? Ask God to guide you in making changes that will enable you to more fully honor God’s name.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, let me honor your name with my speech, and with my way of life. Through me, uphold the holiness of your name. Amen.

Family Activity:

Read Matthew 6:9-13. Jesus taught us how to pray in the Lord’s Prayer. He also used his words and actions to show others how to pray. Spend time in prayer as a family. Together, walk around the different rooms in your home. Where does your family feel most comfortable and at peace? Where would you enjoy spending time talking to and listening to God? After listening to each other’s ideas, discuss and agree upon a special place where you can pray together as a family. Invite each person to place a symbol or an object in the prayer area that will help your family focus on spending time with God. Thank God for Jesus who modeled prayer for us.