

RTO™ School of Prayer

Praying to Your Father Matthew 6:9

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’”

By Dave Mozdin

Everyone has an earthly father. It's God's design (Gen 1:27-28, 2:24). Your earthly father has or has had an impact, an influence on you, one way or another, whether good, bad, or unknown. Thinking about your earthly father will activate feelings inside of you, and they could well be strong feelings, positive or negative.

In view of this, what does a God honoring good father look like? How is he supposed to live? According to God's word, he is to: teach God's words “diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deut. 6:7). He is to diligently discipline his children, I know I risk controversy here by adding that this verse from Proverbs 13:24 also instructs to not spare the rod, he is to not “provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Eph 6:4), and once more “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Col 3:21).

In reality, however, this is far from what a number of us experienced with our earthly fathers, even for some of us who considered our fathers to be basically good men. Some of us were abused, physically, verbally, emotionally, and sadly, sexually. Some of our fathers were unfaithful to our mothers, some were drunks and/or drug addicts, some gave little or no financial support, some committed crimes and went to prison, some suffered death because of their lifestyles, and some abandoned us when we were very young and some we never really knew at all.

Worst of all, the effects of these sins of the fathers will, in many cases, have a deep and lasting impact on their families over time. As the Bible teaches us in Exodus 20:5: “...for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,”. As John MacArthur writes: “The effect of a disobedient generation was to plant wickedness so deeply that it took several generations to reverse.”

The fact that this verse about the sins of the fathers passing to so many generations was written so long ago is evidence that this problem has existed for a long time. It was no different, too, at the time that Jesus Christ Himself walked this earth and began His ministry. The cultural norm of that point in history was that many fathers ruled their families with an iron fist and were hardly heralds of godly encouraging compassionate love.

It was into this setting that Jesus came, and as He began His ministry with the Sermon on the Mount, He addressed the concept of fatherhood in a new and revolutionary way, in a way which no one had ever before seen! He gives us the revelation that God is His AND our Father.

As J. I. Packer writes in his book, *Knowing God*; “In Old Testament times, as we have seen, God gave His people a covenant name by which to speak of Him and call upon Him: the name Yahweh (“Jehovah”, “the Lord”). Packer also writes; “Though Yahweh was His covenant name, it spoke to Israel of what their God was in relation in *Himself* rather than of what He would be in relation to them.

Packer goes on to explain that the attribute or character of God that is most often emphasized is God's holiness, His separateness, His being "other than" anything or anyone else. In Isaiah 6, in the prophet's vision, the Lord God is "high and lifted up" (v.1), and the seraphim (angels) are flying around God's throne calling out "Holy, holy, holy..." (v.3). This is the same God the Israelites encountered at Mt. Sinai, where God appeared to Moses and issued specific instructions in advance that anyone who touched the mountain or even the edge of it would face death. (Exodus 19:12-13). The same God who then descended upon Mt. Sinai in fire and smoke as the mountain trembled, accompanied by a trumpet blast that grew louder and louder. (Exodus 19:16-20).

This is the same God who said "'See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.'" And "I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh—with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the long-haired heads of the enemy.'" (Deut. 32:39, 42)

These are just a few of many instances where a holy God showed His might, wrath, and awesome power, to hold people in fear of Him. This was the type of God to whom some of us (myself included) from conservative orthodox backgrounds were first introduced. Not exactly the God you would feel good about addressing as "Father" when you pray to Him.

With this view of a Holy, seemingly unapproachable God in view at this point in redemptive history, Jesus appears, and seemingly out of nowhere He instructs the people to begin prayer to this same God with the words "Our Father". Not just His Father (as Jesus is God's Son and is also worthy to approach God that way), but **OUR** Father. How did Jesus arrive at that?

In John 1:12 we read; "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," and Galatians 3:26; "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." Jesus is the One who brings us to God! Please note, however, that to have the right to become a child of God and be a son of God, you must believe in His Name, through faith. You must embrace Christ by faith, confess to Him that you are a sinner, know that Christ alone can and will forgive your sins, and give you His perfect right standing (righteousness) so you can stand before this Holy God and be spared from His eternal wrath in hell and be guaranteed the indescribable joys of heaven with Him forever. Then you can be His child and then you can call Him "Father"!

The apostle Paul continues in Galatians 4:4-7 as to how you officially enter God's family once you are saved by grace through faith in Christ, *by adoption*; "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

The Reformation Study Bible states: "Justification is the basic blessing on which adoption is founded; adoption is the crowning blessing for which justification clears the way." And "Adoption results in a new relationship." If you've ever adopted a child or if you yourself have been adopted, you know the adopted child has a new relationship because he or she is going to a new family. This is true for us too who are adopted into God's family through Christ.

And what a great family we now have! Since Jesus is the Son of God and we are God's children, and as Manny Mill often says, that makes *Jesus our older brother*, according to Hebrews 2:11, "For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers". Also, when the women meet Jesus soon after His resurrection on that first Easter Sunday, "Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there

they will see me.” (Matt 28:10). As an added blessing, as our older brother, Jesus is our one true intercessor, who goes to the Father for us in our requests. (John 14:13, 1 Tim 2:5, Heb 7:25).

So how do we go beyond our concept of our earthly father to boldly and confidently pray to our good, good heavenly Father? (Matt 6:8) First, let’s identify and describe more of the characteristics and attributes of the One to whom we pray, *our Father*. A few minutes ago, we looked at some verses that told of His holiness, His might, His power, His wrath, but that is hardly a description of all of who He is. His wonderful word, the Bible, in its entirety, tells us as much of who He is as our finite feeble human brains can understand. God’s word also tells of His inestimable outstanding goodness and all the abundance of blessings He constantly gives us, whether we are aware of it or not, whether we give Him honor, praise, or thanks for it or not.

For those of you who were abandoned or neglected: “He will not leave you or forsake you.” Deut. 31:6 (b). For those of you who were abused: “The eternal God is your dwelling place,^[a] and underneath are the everlasting arms.” (Deut. 33:27(b)). For those of you who never knew your father: “to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless.” (Psalm 10:14 (b)), and “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.” (Psalm 68:5). For those of you who knew of your father’s unfaithfulness to your mother: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” (Jer 31:3 (b)).

Matthew Henry writes: “If he be our Father, He will pity us under our weaknesses and infirmities (Psalm 103:13, ‘As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.’), will spare us (Malachi 3:17 ‘They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.’), will deny us nothing that is good for us (Matt 7:11 ‘If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!’ also Luke 11:13).”

Matthew Henry again: “When we come repenting of our sins, we must eye God as Father, as the prodigal son did (Luke 15:18, Jer 3:19); when we come begging for grace, and peace, and the inheritance and blessing of sons, it is an encouragement that we come to God, not as an unreconciled, avenging Judge, but as a loving, gracious, reconciled Father in Christ (Jer 3:4 “Have you not just now called to me, ‘My father, you are the friend of my youth—“).”

As you can see, these verses highlight the goodness of our great God as Father and we have much encouragement and comfort in this, yet we do not want to take our relationship with Him for granted and presume upon that goodness. This is why Jesus next identifies our Father as the One who is “*in heaven*”. Heaven is His abode, the place where He lives, and is a place that we haven’t seen (although we have the great and sure hope that we will see it one day!), a place whose location we don’t know, but that it’s UP somewhere, and He is so mighty that even this heaven cannot contain Him. Heaven is the location of His throne where He sovereignly rules as the One True Living God over all.

“The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” (Psalm 103:19). Heaven is the place where His word is settled or firmly fixed (Psalm 119:89)

So, there is a tension here. We are told we can pray to God as Father, but that does not change His mighty majestic heavenly standing with us. He is still the one who can kill or make alive (in perfect justice, as all His attributes are perfect), the One from who NONE can deliver out of His hand (from the Deut. 32 verses cited earlier). He is the One who “determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names (Psalm 147:4), yet He is the One who has numbered the hairs on your head (Matt

10:30), has engraved you on the palms of His hands (Isa 49:16), and knows what you need before you even ask. (Matt 6:8).

Knowing all this about our gracious, loving, merciful, mighty Father, how do we best respond? Jesus again tells us in the next four words of this passage, “hallowed be Your Name.” We have often recited this line and read or spoke the word “hallowed”, but do we *really* know what it means? It’s an old word and this verse is one of its few remaining uses (except for some Chicago Bears fans who refer to the team’s main office as “the hallowed halls of Halas Hall”). Vine’s Bible dictionary defines it as being from the Greek word *hagiazō*, which means “to make holy” (from *hagios*, holy), signifies set apart for God, to sanctify, to make a person or thing the opposite of *koinos*, or “common”. The Jerusalem Bible translation says it this way: “Your Name be held holy”.

John MacArthur offers a good summary of what it means to hallow the Father’s Name. First, “scripture commands believers to be holy (1 Peter 1:16), whereas it recognizes God as being holy. So attributing to Him the holiness that is His is how we hallow His Name.” Second, “As with every other truly righteous action, hallowing God’s Name must begin in the heart. Peter reminds us to ‘sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts’ (1 Peter 3:15 NASB).” Third, “Discovering and believing scriptural truth about God is also a way to hallow His Name. David was a great example of this: ‘I have set the Lord continually before me.’ (Psalm 16:8 NASB).” Spending time daily in God’s word is a wonderful way to discover truth about who He is and how you can further hallow His Name. Fourth, “Perhaps the greatest way for all of us to hallow His Name is by following His will—”. “I delight to do your will, O my God;” (Psalm 40:8), and later in this prayer Jesus does instruct us to ask His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Fifth, “...we hallow God’s Name by drawing others to Him. ‘In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.’ (Matt 5:16).”

Manny Mill has also said that we hallow the Father’s Name by praying and doing the next several requests in this prayer model, praying that His kingdom come, and living as if His kingdom is already on earth, (because it is!), and praying and doing His will on earth as it is in heaven.

As we wrap this up and bring it all together, one more item. If you have or have had a Father who was abusive, drunk, absent, unfaithful, distant, a deadbeat, a criminal, and thinking about him is very painful for you, forgive him *in Christ*, use the concepts you learned in this lesson to help you understand appreciate the eternal value of your heavenly Father. This will help you to be closer to God. Remember Jesus’ example as He hung on the cross, suffering the most unjust death the world has ever known and what He said about the very people who did that to Him: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34). If your earthly father is not saved, pray/cry out to God to bring him to saving faith in Christ. Our God is a God who desires all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). If he is saved and has wandered away from the faith, please pray that God revives and restores him (2 Peter 3:9). If your earthly father has done anything good to you or for you, thank God for him, tell him you love him. Regardless of what type of earthly father you have or have had, remember God’s commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12). Live your life in a way that honors him and honors God your heavenly Father as well. “

It is my prayer that after hearing /reading/studying this lesson about praying to your Father that you will be able to say, with exceeding joy, from your heart, “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly

than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Eph 3:20-21).

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