

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

February 18, 2018

Our Father – The Lord's Prayer

Heather Zempel

Earlier this week I asked my year old daughter Sawyer what happens on Easter and she said I get yummy things. I have no idea who taught her that and so I changed the course of my question a little bit, I said ok Sawyer, what happened on Easter? She said treats! So I'm doing a terrible job discipling my kid hopefully I'll do a better job this weekend. We are entering a new season called Lent on Wednesday, Ash Wednesday we go into a season of Lent. Now for some of you, you come from church traditions where you practice that and so you're very familiar with that season others of you think I might just be talking about the stuff you scrape off the screen and your clothes dryer. But in short, Lent is a season of 40 days leading up to Easter to prepare our hearts for celebrating the resurrection. It's a season the 40 days kinda reflects on remembers Jesus day wilderness journey as he was praying and fasting and preparing his heart for ministry. And I found that as I approach Easter I can enter into the joy and the celebration and the life of resurrection much better if I've spent some time on my own wilderness journey of prayer and reflection and repentance. And so here at NCC we've started a 40-day prayer challenge. If you haven't picked up a copy of Pastor Mark's "Draw the Circle" I would encourage you to do that. For our families, our kid's team has put together an awesome resource to walk through this 40-day prayer challenge with our kids. And I just invite you to be a part of that and along with that new season that we're engaging in were also starting a new sermon series this weekend and fittingly it's on prayer on the Lord's Prayer. We find it in a couple of places in our Bible in the sermon on the mountain Matthew 6; we also find it in Luke 11. And so if you have your Bibles with you this weekend I would invite you to go ahead take them out open 'em up you can go to Matthew 6 take a pen out because we want a mark things up and write things down and discover things during this series. If you don't have a Bible with you I would encourage you to pull up your phone pull up the Bible app or otherwise you can just follow along on the screen with us because during this series I want us to dig in and really learn together.

Now in Luke 11, the disciples ask Jesus, Lord teach us to pray, teach us to pray. This was actually potentially a kind of curious question coming from this group of men because these were Jewish boys, they had learned to pray from a very young age, they'd been praying their whole lives, in fact, they prayed some of the same Old Testament texts that we pray today. I would actually argue that Peter and John probably could have prayed circles around some of us no pun intended for Mark Batterson language. But they were Jewish kids they knew how to pray and yet they come to their teacher and they say teach us to pray. Now I think when we understand a little bit about the context they we're in, in their history and their culture it opens up the door and unlocks some keys to understanding not only why they ask this question but what their relationship was like with Jesus and what the prayer Jesus taught the means for us today. Now one of the problems I think we have when we come to the scripture is that when we read the Bible we have this western lens through which we filter the words were reading and if we want to understand the teachings of Jesus then we're going to have to enter in to the world of first-century Judaism and we're going to have to get into the mind and the worldview of a first century Jewish Rabbi named Jesus of Nazareth. I think what we got to remember is that this book is not a fairy tale, it's not Marvel Comics where Jesus just shows up one day with a cape

and superpowers to change the world. This didn't happen a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away it happened at a real place, in a real-time, with real people which meant that there was culture and language and traditions. I don't say any of this to make light of Jesus divinity but so that we can make the most of his teaching that Jesus came from a very specific and unique context and when we enter his world we can better apply his teachings in our world today. And so if you'll allow me for just a moment to nerd out a little bit and stick with me because I think some context and some background will help us unlock keys to this prayer over the next few weeks.

So about 200 years before Jesus was born the Jewish people began praying this standard prayer called the Amidah or the 18 benedictions. It was 18 stanzas of different prayers and the Jewish people were taught to pray this prayer Jesus would have been taught to pray this prayer. Have you ever wondered who taught Jesus how to pray? It was probably his father Joseph. But Jesus knew this prayer but was very long and in the Jewish people kind of had this requirement to pray it at least once a day and so what some of the religious teachers would do is take that very long prayer, those 18 benedictions and shorten it into their own abbreviated version and they would teach their followers if all else fails, if you can't do the whole thing just pray this every day, pray this shorten abbreviated version of it. So when the disciples come to Jesus and say teach us to pray they're probably asking Jesus, Rabbi what is your unique shortened abbreviated version of the benedictions. Teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples to pray. Tell us what is your unique take on this prayer and when we put the Lord's Prayer up against those 18 benedictions it is strikingly similar. This was very clearly Jesus saying look we live in this unique religious context this is the prayer we've been taught to pray and this is my this is my highlights version if all else fails, pray this. And so what we find in the Lord's Prayer, not something that would have been brand new or shocking or revolutionary to those disciples it would have been words that they were very familiar with and the length of it wouldn't have been shocking to them, the contents would not have been shocking to them. But Jesus does exclude some things that are fascinating in the original long prayer, for instance, there were references to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There were pleas for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the restoration of the temple very Jewish centered ideas. And so even though Jesus gives the disciples right back a very Jewish prayer he strips it of some of its cultural trappings so that it is a prayer that accessible to all people. So that's the first thing he does, he opens up access he says this is a prayer that can be open to all and prayed by all.

Another thing I think Jesus does is he shifts priorities and focuses priorities. This is important for us in the twenty-first century because I think a lot of times in our western Christianity we approach prayer as an antidote for our messes and an order form for our wants, that's what prayer, is about. Get me out of this and give me that. And yet the prayer that we see Jesus praying re-shifts the priorities reminding us that there's a bigger world out there and a bigger God who's in charge and there's a role he's invited us to play in it. Yes we find a God who is concerned about every detail of our lives including the bread that we eat on a daily basis but there's also a God who is bringing kingdoms and is shifting the history of the world it's a God who is inviting us to play a role and the story that he is writing on the largest stages of human history so he gives access he shifts priorities.

And the other thing that I think is really important for us to understand about the context of this prayer is it's being prayed by a man who is living under foreign occupation and against the backdrop of very oppressive forces and yet we find in this prayer a hope that defies every current reality that they're facing. It's a prayer that looks to a coming kingdom and talks about freedom and provision and deliverance. It's about access it's about shifting priorities and it's about hope. And so in Matthew 6:9 Jesus begins to teach his disciples his highlight reel prayer and he begins with the words our, our. Let's not skip that first word our Father. See I think a lot of times we take a very privatized approach to our faith. My faith is my private business, your faith is your private business or we make God into a very personalized God, we tend to kind of make him in our own image or we think we have exclusive rights to God or try to put words in God's mouth based on our personal preferences oh my God would never. And yet Jesus points us to not a personal prayer but a communal prayer. Right from the very beginning, he establishes two relationships a vertical relationship with the Father and a horizontal relationship with one another, our Father. One thing that I think is cool about this is that Jesus begins 'our Father' meaning he gives access to everyone. He doesn't throw down a gauntlet of requirements that you have to fulfill in order to come before the Father. He doesn't say this is who you've got to be in order to have access to the Father. He says our, all of us; no one can claim exclusive rights to his fatherhood.

You might be here this weekend and maybe you're here in church for the very first time ever or you don't know what you think about this Bible and Christianity kind of stuff the good news I have for you this weekend is that because of Jesus you have full access to the Father, our Father. And we also realize in this is that this is not about me, myself and mine. It's about us and our. And I know some of you are probably a little bit skeptical thinking man she's making a big deal out of that word our, he didn't mean to make it that big a deal about it. Well I would just give a little teaser that later in the prayer Jesus also prays give us this day our daily bread so I think it's very intentional and very meaningful that we are called to realize that we're a part of something bigger than ourselves and we pray together it's not about me prayers it's about us prayers. The answer to your prayers affects the answers to my prayers I would encourage you, especially during the season find some people to pray with. There's a group of us for those of you that are near one of our Capitol Hill campuses every morning Tuesday to Friday in the Performance Base of Ebenezer were joining together at 7:00 in the morning to pray together. Wherever you are find some co-workers, some friends, some neighbors and say during this season as we go into this Lenten season as we're preparing for Easter let's join together and pray together to our Father, Father.

It's interesting if we look at the historical context referring to God as Father was not a new thing for the Jewish people. God actually referred to himself as Father several times in the Old Testament. The first time actually is very interesting in the book of Exodus during the Exodus story he says these are my kids they're not slaves. And the Jewish people were very accustomed to referring to God as Father when they prayed. But it was by far Jesus favorite title for God, he used that title 165 times in the Gospels. Now what's interesting about where we are today in our culture in our context is that there is a wide spectrum of reactions to that word. Some of us come from families that had great fathers and so it's very easy for us to resonate with that language and relate to God in that way, that's an attractive idea to relate to God as Father. Some of us had different circumstances maybe we had difficult fathers or difficult relationships with our fathers

or maybe they were absent emotionally or physically. Some of you have a hard time relating to God as father because you've been abused or manipulated by men or authority. And so because of these stories and unique perspectives that we bring to the text we have all of these different responses to it. Some of us run to the idea of God as father because we didn't have that we long for that. Some of us run to the idea of God as father because we did have a good father and it's easy for us to relate to him in that way and for others of us it's just really difficult to think about God as father. And if that's you here this weekend the first thing I want to tell you is you're not alone so don't let the enemy try to tell you that because you can't view God that way that there is no place for you and his family you are not alone I guarantee there other people around you this weekend that feel the same way. And what I would ask you to do is just spend some time with Jesus. I would encourage you to spend some time in his words, his teachings, his actions because he said if you have seen me you've seen the Father. And what I see in Jesus is this heart to restore our understanding of what the fatherhood of God is really about. Spend time with Jesus to understand who he is as a father.

I think it's interesting the pictures that Jesus gives us of what kind of father God is. We see one picture in the story we know as the story of the prodigal son. This man has two sons and one of the sons comes to him and says giving half of the inheritance and he goes off and he squanders it in ridiculous living. He throws away the good gifts of the father to the pig literally and he comes to a point where he realizes he's lost and he's alone and he crawls back home. And as he grovels at the foot of the dad he says I just want to be able to earn my food. And the dad has been at the window watching and waiting and hoping for the day that his son would return. And as his son is down at his feet he lifts him up and says you are my son and he honors him and he celebrates him. And the picture that we see of God as father and that story is that it doesn't matter what you have done, it doesn't matter how far you have run, it doesn't matter how far away from God you feel he is watching and waiting to celebrate you coming home, to welcome you home, to embrace you as his kid.

Then there's another picture that Jesus gives us it's actually over in Luke 11 where he has the same teaching on this prayer. And he talks about how fathers give good gifts to their kids or good fathers give good gifts to their kids and God is the best father and so how much more will the gifts be for his kids? And Jesus illustrates it by telling the story about a man who has a home and one night there's a knock on the door and it's his neighbor that says I need some food, I need to borrow some food. And the owners like man it is like midnight, my family is asleep, the doors locked I can't help you right now but the neighbor kept knocking and kept asking for food and kept on and on and finally the owner of this house got so irritated that he went and he gave some food to the guy. And Jesus said that you know the owner wasn't willing to help the neighbor because a friendship but because of, and these are Jesus words, because of the neighbor's shameless audacity the owner was willing to help and that's how God is. He responds to shameless audacity maybe we need to learn that we can approach the father with shameless audacity and strong will tenacity.

My two-year-old, we have a routine every night before she goes to bed and I swear gets longer and longer and longer. You know we read three books, that's the standard and then she wants more and more and more and another one and then we kneel by the bed to pray and she's kind of praying, I don't really know what she's doing and at the end of the prayer she hops on my back

and she says on Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen I have no idea. And then when I finally get her in bed she grabs my arm, locks it in and says stay with me mommy, stay with me mommy, I need you mommy I need you mommy just stay with me for a little while. The other night we had a babysitter in and when I got home I was like well how did Sawyer do? Well, she was perfect. I was like how many books did she make you make you read? Just one. I was like oh! Well did she hop on your back and act like she was Santa Clause? She's like no. Did she make you stay in there forever? She said no I just put her in bed she said night-night and I left. It's like, all right, you can come over every night and put this kid to bed. Sawyer does that with me and with Ryan because she has a different relationship with us and because she has a different relationship with us she approaches us differently and she asks us for things differently, she approaches me with shameless audacity and very strong-willed tenacity. We're God's kids. He's a good father, he's a father who guides and heals and comforts and cares he's strong enough protect you and yet tender enough to heal you, he's wise enough to teach you and patient enough for us to get our act together and he is close enough to see you and to hear you and to know you. And when we understand, when we consider the closeness of the father it gives us confidence in our relationship with him, our Father in heaven.

Now a lot of times again in our context when we think heaven we think of a future destination as in I will go to heaven when I die but when Jesus says this he's talking not so much about a future destination as he's talking about a current reality. It might better be translated our Father in the heavens, our Father who is above all creation, our Father who is above and beyond the world we live in a God who has the perspective of the heavens. And it's not so much a statement about where he is as it is about who he is. That he's not just a bigger, better version of us, he's completely other, it's a theological word called transcendence. And so what Jesus is telling us is that we've got the closeness of the Father with the perspective of the heavens. When we started our long story short series about last year Pastor Mark opened it with his quote that God is bigger than big and closer than close and that's what Jesus is saying our Father who is close, who's in proximity in the heavens who has position and power and perspective. When we pray do we understand the power and the position that our Father has? Do we pray like David prayed when he said yours Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory, the majesty and the splendor for everything in heaven and earth is yours? Or as Paul prayed now to him who is able to do a measurably more than all we could ever ask or imagine or Jeremiah who says you've made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm nothing is too difficult for you or the Psalmist who says your loving kindness is great above the heavens.

Do we recognize that the one we pray to has power and position and authority. In Isaiah, he says for as the heavens are higher than the earth so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. When we have the perspective of the one in the heavens it makes our problems here look very different. We have perspective when we declare the greatness of God we're able to depend more on his goodness and grace. Jesus says you pray to one who has the proximity of the Father and the perspective of the heavens. And then Jesus prays hallowed be your name. Now we often tend to think of this in terms of a statement of praise hallowed be your name, you're awesome you holy, your majestic, you are good, you're merciful. But in the way that this text renders it, it's more like saying may your name be sanctified, that'd be a better translation. It's not so much a declaration of who God is it's a request for what God does, may you sanctify your name. It's a request for God to do something. Now to sanctify

means to make holy, to set apart, it's something that causes one to stand in awe and wonder, may you sanctify your name, may your name be sanctified.

Now stick with me for a minute because this is fascinating. There are two ways we find in scripture that God sanctifies his name, two ways that God sets apart his name, two ways that God puts his name in a place where people stand in awe and wonder. The first is by his own actions what he does. For instance in Ezekiel 38:23 we read. 'I will magnify myself, sanctify myself and make myself known in the sight of many nations and they will know I am the Lord'. God is sanctifying his name, setting apart his name, causing his name to be famous because of the work he is doing in the world, his actions in the world. But here's what's crazy God's name is not just sanctified by his actions but also our actions. In Numbers 20 we read a story about Moses who is been disobedient in following the instructions of the Lord and in verse 12 we read God says 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites you will not bring this community in the land I give them'. Moses is look, your actions did not sanctify me, your actions did not set my name apart, your actions in front of all the Israelites made your name famous and not mine. Jesus says in a way that might be more accessible to us in Matthew 5:16 Jesus says, 'let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to the Father who is in heaven'. Jesus says that when you let your light shine when you do good works it sanctified the name of the Father it makes the name of Jesus famous in your generation. Our actions can sanctify the name of God when we follow Jesus and we do what Jesus did the way that he did it and we walk in obedience to Father we sanctify his name, we make his name famous in our generation God's name is at stake in us.

And what's amazing about this prayer is it's not just about asking God for what we want, it's not just about asking God to clean up our messes it's saying God would you come and make yourself famous right here right now and as I walk in your ways I want to play a role in making your name famous in my generation as well. There's so much packed in this first line of this prayer. We realize that we're created by someone bigger than us for a story much larger than our own creation. And when we come to God we say, God I want, I want to partner with you and the work you're doing in the world then our actions will proclaim his name to the world around us. Our father in heaven hallowed be your name.

Well you might be here this weekend and you don't you've never taken that first step in following Jesus this is a great weekend to do it. Lord teach us to pray and Jesus gives us his heart on how to pray to the Father I invite you, I invite you to take a step, take a daring step to start following Jesus this weekend. Find somebody, come talk to one of the pastors, to the prayer team across all of our locations. I want to encourage you to follow Jesus more deeply look to Jesus to understand the Father, get the perspective that he has in the heavens and join the work that he's doing around the world. Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name we pray to the One who has the proximity of a father and as we consider his closeness we grow in our confidence in that relationship in the heavens he's one who has the perspective of the heights of the heavens and as we declare his greatness we can better depend on his goodness and grace. May your name be sanctified.

God, we invite you to do what you do we plead with you to do what you do we request that you do what you do to make your name famous and we want to play a role in the story that you're writing in history. And then finally we pray together to our Father and so this weekend across all

of our locations I want us to just pray the Lord's prayer together so if our media team could put the prayer up on the screens across all of our campuses and if you would go ahead and stand with me and we'll pray together. Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.