

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Our Father – The Lord's Prayer

Heather Zempel

When I was pregnant, I decided I wanted to read the Bible out loud to Sawyer from the moment that she would be able to hear. So at 20 weeks when I knew her hearing had developed in order to recognize my voice I began to read to her the book of Deuteronomy. Now I chose this book because it happens to be one of my favorites and also because in ancient times was the first book of the Bible that Jewish kids memorized, and so I just thought that would be really cool, but I discovered it's one thing to read Deuteronomy for yourself. It's another thing to read it out loud to a baby. And so I found myself like every couple of pages having to give a disclaimer, feeling like I needed to defend God, telling her, hold on baby. It's going to get better. I promise. Just hang with me. I want to welcome you this weekend to a conversation that we're in the middle of called God in the Hands of Angry People. Two weekends ago, Pastor Mark kicked us off and said that in the beginning, God created us in his image and we've been returning the favor ever since creating God in our image. And when God is like us, then that God loves everyone we love, hates everyone we hate and only does the things that we would do and that can be a very dangerous God. Last week, Pastor Joel continued the conversation by talking about counterfeit gods. Either god's, we've created an image or that had been handed to us from culture or maybe a very innocent child, appropriate version of God that we just never allowed to grow up with us. And what we've discovered is that many people have embraced counterfeit gods. All of us have embraced counterfeit gods. And it could be that some of you walked away from faith because you lost faith in a god who never existed in the first place. And this weekend we're going to continue the conversation and we're going to talk about the god of the Old Testament. I would encourage you, if you didn't hear those first who messages go to theaterchurch.com listened to them, get caught up, and uh, and we're gonna get to do that this weekend, the Old Testament.

Because here's the deal. If you, if you have a problem with God and maybe you're not struggling with a counterfeit God, you're saying, no, I'm, I'm struggling with the God as he reveals himself in his own book. If you have a problem with the God of the Bible, it is probably because of something he did in the Old Testament. It says, though God was in a really bad mood for thousands of years, and then Jesus showed up on the scene and God got saved, and that's how we tend to sometimes approach that part of the Bible and if we're honest there are stories in there, we don't know what to do with. For example, Noah gets drunk and naked after the flood. We don't tell that part of the story to our kids even though we decorate their rooms with the ark, that story that's about the elimination of everyone in the world. And then there's the story about God sending the death angel to wipe out all the Egyptian kids. Side Note, why does God even have a death angel? And then there's the story about women who have been accused of adultery, having to be brought by their accusing husbands to the temple to drink this magic potion of water and temple dust, and if she got sick, then that means she's guilty and if not, she's innocent. It's in Numbers five, check it out. And then there's the prophet Jephthah who offers to sacrifice his daughter in exchange for victory in battle. What do we do with that stuff?

In The God Delusion Richard Dawkins takes it so far as to say, The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniac. I knew I was going to mess up that word.

Megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously, malevolent bully. Richard Dawkins tell us how you really feel about God. But the reality is that God in the hands of angry people has been used to justify all kinds of violence and oppression in the name of Jesus.

I want to give a disclaimer right at the beginning of this weekend that I will probably raise more questions than I will answer this weekend and I would much rather have this as a conversation on my front porch because I think when we approach topics like this conversation is much, much better than declaration. And a lot of times when we approach topics like this, we face a lot of tension, both tension within ourselves and maybe tension with one another because we're all coming from different perspectives and different places in our faith journey, and so what I want to encourage us this weekend is to walk in humility, to link arms in unity, to try to walk in grace and give ourselves space and one another space to wrestle through some of these topics.

What do we do with the God of the Old Testament? Let me give a quick snapshot before we go any further, the Old Testament is actually a library of 39 different books written across several generations by several different types of authors. It was embraced as sacred text by the Jewish people, was probably first put together by a guy by the name of Ezra and the first five books of the Bible give very ancient history and also a moral and legal code that the Jewish people followed. The rest of the history is found in the books of Joshua through the book of Esther. And this includes their, their calling into the promised land and the establishment of the kingdom and the kingdom splitting in two, and the kingdom being conquered, and the kingdom being sent into exile and the people of God being brought back to Jerusalem and reestablishing their land. So that's, Joshua the book of Esther. And then all of the poets and the prophets are inserted into that historical narrative.

The primary purpose of the Old Testament is to reveal who God is and what he is up to in the world. The primary storyline is God choosing for himself a family and saying, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to turn you into a great nation through you all the nations of the world will be blessed. He takes that family, puts them right at the crossroads of the ancient world and says to them, be obedient to me. If you are obedient to me, you will flourish and my story will expand across the globe. If you're disobedient, you will be exiled or occupied. And we see that it contains this moral code in this legal code that they're to follow, it establishes a pathway for them to pursue ritual purity with their creator. It contains this story of national identity as they, as they move from being slaves to being free people. It's a story of national renewal as they go from people who live in exile to people who were restored to their land. And for those of us today, it might seem like, what does that matter then? What does this book or this series of books written so long ago to a different people at a different time in a different culture, in a different language? What does that have to do with me today? Why does a book that contains a moral code and a legal code that was not written to me or for me? What does that matter? What does this story about national identity that's not my nationally. Why should this series of books matter, especially if it contains so many potential stumbling blocks? Well, I think there's three major reasons why it matters.

One, I think it matters. I think the Old Testament matters because if the New Testament matters to us, the Old Testament matter to the New Testament writers, there are over a thousand references to the Old Testament in the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament writers could not talk about Jesus without the Old Testament's spewing out of their mouths the most quoted book in the New Testament are Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms.

The second reason I think the Old Testament matters is because it mattered to Jesus. First of all because it was the foundational worldview that Jesus emerged from. If we want to understand Jesus and who he was and what he was about, we have to first and foremost understand that he was a first century Jew. And so he comes from a worldview and a context that was founded upon the writings and the culture established in the Old Testament, but also when Jesus stood up and declared for the first time, this is my mission. That is what I've come to accomplish this as my purpose. He opened up the Old Testament and read from the scroll of Isaiah. And he said, this is why I've come so the Old Testament matters because it mattered to Jesus. And I'm sorry if there was a man who liked dies and walks out of a grave. I'm going to go with him.

The third reason I think it matters is because the Old Testament points to and prepares the way for Jesus, whether it's from the sacrificial system to the story of bondage, to liberation, the story of exile to restoration, the Messianic hopes that are expressed in the prophets, everything in the Old Testament sets up the stage for Jesus to show up on the scene and change history.

I think it also matters because if we asked this question of what is it that God is revealing about himself and what is he up to in the world? We see so much of that in just the first few pages of the Old Testament. I want to share just a few stories to kind of illustrate that. One. We see the first story, the story of creation in Genesis 1 & 2 in the beginning, God created and at the sound of his voice, galaxies were hurled into orbit. Light beamed from having water covered the earth, potential energy and kinetic energy reservoirs were deposited around the universe to fuel its existence for billions of years. Eukaryote cells and prokaryotic cells and algae and ferns and plants and insects and birds and fish and mammals were created at the sound of his voice and it was all good. Now, when we hear that word good, we often think of it as meaning excellent or attractive or pleasant or, you know, maybe passing grade, but in the original language, the word good meant functional, working, ordered. In the very first page of scripture we see a God who by his will and the word of his mouth brings order out of chaos. I know a lot of times we hear this argument with that's not the only creation story out there. There are, there are other ancient tales of creation and other religions and some even more ancient than this one. What makes this one stand out is that it is not a pantheon of gods creating and it's not a pantheons of god's creating by accident or creating because of conflict. It is one God who with one word brings order out of chaos. And that causes it to stand apart from every other ancient writing.

See, I think a lot of times when we read the story of creation through a modern lens, we come to it with questions of how and we become obsessed with, well, how did he do it? What does this tell us about how he did it? I mean was it six days literal days or was it over the course of several thousand years? Or did he actually use evolution somehow and I just wonder if how is the wrong question? If the original intent of the scripture was leading us to bigger questions of not how, but of who and why? If the creation story is meant to draw out mystery more than to lead us to science, if the creation story is more about evoking a posture of worship than leading to some place of intellectual understanding and certainty a god by his will and his word bringing order out of chaos. It also tells us something very important about ourselves. It tells us that we were created in the image of our creator and not only that, but we were to be his representatives on earth. This also causes the story to stand in direct contrast to other stories of time when humanity was created at the whim of the gods or created just for the god's entertainment or to be pawns in the hands of the gods or to be just their slaves. This God created man and woman to bear his image and to be his representatives on earth. How does that change the way we view ourselves? How does it change the way we view God? How does it change the way we view one another and relate to one another?

The second story, Genesis three, one chapter later, the image bearers mess it up. Eve is approached by a talking serpent. Yes, the Bible is weird. And asked, did God really say calls the man and the woman to reach for the one thing God said no to? They went and they hid. And again, we learned something very important about ourselves in the story because we see that this is how temptation works over and over and over and over and over and over again. Did God really say no? God just doesn't want you to have that because if you have that, you will be like him. We allow someone or something to define us, to label us, to limit us, to put us in a box, to question us, and that causes us to look to something other than our creator to give us value and gives us meaning and we begin to grab onto stuff to define us into, to label us better, and we grab at things like work or sex or entertainment or pleasure or alcohol or relationship, and we find that as we grab those things to try to give us meaning, they don't add to us, they actually defeat us, they steal from us. But we also learned something very important about God in the story because we find a God who, unlike the other gods of the day, didn't require the man and the woman to do something to appease his anger. Rather, he took the situation in his own hands, took responsibility to make a sacrifice to cover their nakedness and their shame. It's a story of something very, very important has been lost, and the length to which God will go to get it back, including something even bigger, is in the works that one day the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. We learned something very important about God in these early chapters.

Then we skip ahead a little bit. Story number three, 12 chapters later, we come to this man by the name of Abram, we know him better as Abraham, he's 75 years old and God says, I'm going to make you into a great nation, and through you all, the nations of the world will be blessed. The only problem is he 75 he doesn't have a kid. Twenty five years later, God gives them a kid by the name of Isaac, and then a few chapters after that, God says, OK, Abraham, take your son Isaac and sacrifice him. And so Abraham gathers the wood. He puts on his hiking boots. He and Isaac go for a little walk up Mount Moriah, and as the knife is poised over his head to kill his son, God intervenes and says, stop. I've provided a ram in the thicket.

Now, here are the questions we bring to this story, right? Um, as a parent. I'm thinking, Abraham, how in the world were you willing to do this? God, if you are good, how in the world would you ask someone to do this? Isaac, did you know what was going on? Were you compliant? Sarah, did you know what was happening? Where they were going, and where are you complicit? Abraham, how did you muster the faith to be able to do this? Isaac, did you ever go hiking with your dad again? I mean these are the questions we ask. This is the stuff we find shocking. But to the earliest readers and heroes of the story, I don't know that those are the questions that they had or what they found most shocking. You see, in that culture, child sacrifice was normal and expected by the gods. It was expected that a god would ask you to kill your kid, to show your obedience and your servitude. What was shocking to the first hearers was not that God would ask this question, but that God would personally show up in the story and say, stop. This is not what I expect. This is not what I demand. You do not have to sacrifice your children. Don't do it.

That's what was shocking to the first culture that encountered this story. The mystery was in a God who would show up and stop it and say, I'm taking responsibility for providing the sacrifice here. So you think sometimes we bring modern questions to ancient texts and then the answers seem insufficient and we just have to keep that in mind when we read these stories. We go page after page in the Old Testament see his mercy, his hope, his forgiveness. It's shocking that we see in the Old Testament a God who commands hospitality to the stranger, fairness to the poor, protection and provision to widows, orphans and refugees, even fair treatment of animals. When we come to the texts of the Old Testament, we find a book that is shockingly progressive in its portrayal of divine love and its acceptance of foreigners and

its affirmation of women. In fact, the central confession of the Old Testament is found in Exodus 34:6 it says, *the Lord, the Lord, the Compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin*. That is the central picture of God we find in the Old Testament and it is repeated and cross every genre that we find. It's mentioned in the law, it's mentioned in the histories, it's mentioned in the poetry and the prophets. Across the Old Testament we find that phrase showing up over and over and over again. So some of these crazy stories, we've got to hold intention with this confession that we find throughout the pages.

But then you come to statements like this. Deuteronomy 7. Sawyer heard this on the first night. *When the Lord your God brings you into the land who were entering to possess and drives out before you. Many nations, the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally*. There are other declarations like this later in Deuteronomy and also in Joshua that contain much more graphic instructions than this. What do you do with God sanctioned, God ordained, God commanded violence, genocide? How does this square with the God who says love your enemy and bless those who persecute you?

I want to use this topic as a case study, this weekend of how you walk through passages like this. And I'm just going to be real up front with you that I'm not going to give an answer to that question because I honestly don't know. And I know some of you are thinking, wait a minute, you're a pastor, preacher, you're supposed to know this stuff. And what I want to do this weekend is instead of being a sage from the stage, just be a guide at your side and let's wrestle this stuff together. All right? This is one I'm currently trying to walk through.

There are five major approaches to understanding why God would ask for the complete destruction of a seemingly innocent people in Canaan. There there are five major interpretations, explanations as to why God would allow violence and use violence and even require as it seems, genocide. The first explanation is just cause, and this is rooted in the characteristic of God that is his justice. It would say these people were in comprehensively wicked and beyond redemption that God had waited for hundreds of years for them to turn from their wicked ways and their wicked practices were infecting other cultures. The just cause you believe that God's violence has always purposeful and he only uses it to punish the wicked and protect the weak and that in this particular situation, the Old Testament, that is what he is doing it is just cause. That there are abundances of hostility and absence of hospitality cause God to say enough is enough the wickedness stops here. Deuteronomy 9:4-5 seems to bear that out as it states twice that God will drive them out because of their wickedness.

The second possible view is the greater good, he did it for the greater good. This is rooted in God's sovereignty that God, because of his sovereign perspective on world history, knew that they would never repent and knew that if they continued in these wicked practices, that it would spread and infect other cultures and God needed to get his people at the crossroads of the ancient world so that his story could spread out across the entire globe. And so for the greater good, he had his people wipe them out so that they could move in you. If you think about it, maybe like a surgeon, that God was amputating what was wicked, what was taking life in order to allow what was healthy to thrive. And Deuteronomy 9:5, Deuteronomy 20, seem to allude to this idea that it was the greater good.

A third view is progressive revelation that this was an ancient time in an ancient culture. Again, we're asking modern questions of ancient texts that in this culture, a god who was not a god of his people and

a god of his land was no god at all. And then a god who was good would actually do this for his people, this idea of progressive revelation that God will show up in the historical and cultural context and meet people where they are and use whatever practices they have and turn them to good in order to show them a fuller understanding and revelation of who he is. And so in this case, ironically, even using warfare to eventually lead people to a story of love and peace and nonviolence saying God was working within the context they were in.

A fourth explanation is, well, it really wasn't as bad as it seems. The writers were using hyperbole that when it says to kill that word actually means to just destroy and push out that they weren't killing individual people they were killing culture, it was hyperbole.

A fifth explanation is ah, it's just good fiction. And this idea is the idea that the Bible, while it is fully inspired, was also fully written by human beings. And they weren't necessarily writing what God told them to do. They were writing down what they thought God wanted them to do. Again, this is an ancient culture, it's tribal people and they just believed, obviously this is what God wants us to do. So whether they did it or not, God was not the one that asked them to do it. A twist on that idea is that actually this story was meant to be a hero story. It was meant to inspire people to give people a myth that leads them to higher levels of living and inspires their hearts. Think like a William Wilberforce or I mean not William Wilberforce, William Wallace or a um, or sorry, no William Wilberforce, good man. William Wallace or, uh, which I think he's a good man to, or a King Arthur like it's hard to separate myth from the man, and fact, from fiction because the stories are meant to inspire more than give us historical accuracy.

Those are, those are five, five major views. So when you come to these places in scripture and you've got these possible explanations, and then what do we do? How do we approach that? How do we walk through that? I want to give just a few best practices. These aren't all the best practices, this isn't everything, um, but maybe some things we can begin to experiment with together. I mean the first thing we need to do, and it's not even on the slides or in my notes or anything, is we need to read these stories. A lot of times people have problems with stories and scripture that they've never actually even read themselves. They've just heard that they were in there. Or we want to grab onto one of these ideas without actually reading the text for ourselves.

So number one, let's read them. And then the first best practice I have listed is finding an anchor point. Whenever we engage in conversation like this, it can become very unsettling. It almost is like when you're playing Jenga and you'll begin to pull out one of the pieces and you're afraid if this piece comes out, the whole thing will fall. And I just believe God is bigger than that. And the Bible is bigger than that and it's not all gonna fall apart. OK? And so maybe to help us, we just need to drop an anchor in some place. And your anchor might be that, well, I believe the Bible can be trusted. I don't know what to do with all of it. I believe that I can trust it. Or maybe it's that this book and the message of this book is transcended culture and language for thousands of years so there's something to it. Maybe you drop an anchor on the idea that God is love, or is that Jesus is Lord or like I said earlier, that a dead man walked out of a grave, whoever does that I'm going to pay attention to. Or maybe you're here this weekend you don't know what you think about Jesus, about God, about Bible, about Christianity, anything but, but there's something about community and you're here this weekend because there's just something about this community that is undeniable and there's something there and you're just, you're gonna say I'm gonna stay connected right here because there's something to this. Or maybe you have this sense that there is some moral compass in the world. There's this universal recognition of right and wrong and

maybe different cultures view them differently, but there's still this idea that there's a right and a wrong in the world, drop an anchor somewhere and then go from there.

Secondly, do it in community don't do this by yourself. Do this in conversation. Wrestle together after a service this week and go have a meal with some people. Talk about it in your small group. Do it in community.

Number three. Question, ask questions. Whenever you come to something in the Bible that seems off, confront it. See, I have a tendency to just read faster, right? And pretend like it's not there, and then I feel like I can't ask God about it because that would feel dishonoring like who am I to ask the Almighty why he would do bad things and act badly. But here's the deal, the more I grow in my faith, the more I believe that questioning God is part of the process because questions lead to conversations and conversations lead to relationship and that is what God is after with us. See, I believe in doubt because I believe that doubt can be a powerful catalyst to faith if we use it to let us lean in to God and say, God, what did you mean and who are you and what are you up to in the world? And then what does that mean for me? And when we ask questions, I would encourage this, a lot of times when we approach the Bible, we start with the question, OK, how do I apply this or what does this mean to me or what does this mean for me? And I think that's the wrong place to start. I think the first question we need to ask is why is this in here? Why is it in there and why did an ancient people keep that book or that particular part of the book around for so long? And then what is God revealing about himself in it? What are we learning about God here? And then we can ask the questions from a better foundation of what does it mean for me? What does it mean to me? What do I need to do with this? So question.

Next, consider the genre and the context. I can't say enough about how important context and historical background makes a difference. We've got some resources on a slide that we'll give to you later in the service and it's just got a few books that have been helpful to me that might be helpful to you to get a better picture of the context that we're reading.

Next, let scripture interpret scripture. When you come across something you don't like, you don't understand, you can't make sense of look to other places in scripture to try to be an interpretive filter for you. For instance, we read over and over and over in the Old Testament, that God is abounding in love and full of compassion and quick to forgive and slow to anger. So how does what we read balance with that? Let scripture interpret scripture.

Next, be honest. I think we have to make sure that we don't get lazy and just say, oh, I like that explanation best because then I don't have to deal with it. Or that's the one that just makes most sense to me. We need to be honest. We need to dig into scripture, we need to let it seep into our hearts. We need to wrestle it down, we need to study it and not just get lazy and it's like, oh, I'll just go with that one because that's easy.

And finally, we've got to pray. We've got to remember that the same spirit, that inspired scripture can illuminate it to the readers today. When we don't understand something that's an invitation to go to the Creator and the Redeemer and Sustainer of the universe and say, what is this about? Help me understand. I think sometimes we forget the power of prayer. We get so wrapped up in our minds and trying to figure it out and trying to intellectualize it and study it so much that we forget that the writer, the author, and the protagonist of this book wants a relationship with us and wants to talk with us.

All right, got a lot to learn. I'm gonna bring us up. OK. We did a deep dive, so I'm going to bring us up and I'm going to bring us full circle. When Sawyer was about three months old, I read to her the book of Genesis. I obviously hadn't learned my lesson with Deuteronomy, but as I started to read to her the creation story, I actually got choked up. I couldn't get but two verses into it before I got choked up and I stopped and I told her Sawyer this is the first time you're hearing a story that has been passed on from generation to generation to generation since the beginning of time. And it was just this moment that I had this flash in my brain of Adam sitting down with Cain and Abel and telling them the creation story for the first time. Of Abraham sitting down with Isaac and telling him the story of the beginnings. Of Isaac sitting down with, with Jacob and Esau and sharing the story. I had this moment where I thought about Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, telling Jesus the creation story for the first time. You can imagine that you're, you're telling the creator the story of creation. And I was overwhelmed by this idea that parents for generations have been passing on the story from the campfires of the ancient Middle Eastern Bedouin to the fireplaces of middle class America. This story has transcended time and culture, this story about a God on a relentless pursuit of people who loves and take responsibility himself, for setting the world right. This story of a God who brings his people from bondage to liberation and exile to restoration and eventually shows up in the skin of his own creation. Spoiler alert, Pastor Joshua next weekend is going to talk about Jesus. We've been feeling very unresolved for the past two weekends. Come back next week because if you need the picture of God to come into sharper focus, it's all wrapped up in Jesus.

Don't walk away from faith because of something in the Old Testament you can't wrap your mind around. Instead, allow that mystery and that unsettledness to draw you closer to the author and protagonist, to develop relationship, to allow that to lead, to wonder and to mystery and to worship. He's a creator who values you. He's a God who took initiative to forgive and to redeem and to reconcile. It's a God who has been at work for thousands of generations with a story that transcends language and time and culture. And he's invited us to have relationship with him and play a role in it.

God, I thank you tonight for this book, that or this collection of books that you've handed down to us, that has come from generation to generation, been passed from parent to child, from teacher to student. And God, we just give ourselves to you. Help us understand what you have written in this ancient texts and help us understand what it means for us today, this weekend. God, for all of those that have walked away from you because of something that you did or that they think that you did in these earliest pages of history, Holy Spirit, I pray that you would just draw close to them and say, hey, let's have a conversation about it. Let's talk about it. God, thank you that you have been faithful for thousands of generations. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.