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The DNA of Prayer: It's Personal, Part 2

Matthew 6:9

Pray then like this: "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name.

Exodus 33:12-17

Moses said to the Lord, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

In Matthew six, Jesus said this: "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites." He was encouraging them to start in private. The hypocrites love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. "Truly," he says, "I say to you, they have received their reward."

People who pray as a demonstration to other people and do it in a way that is kind of showy—Jesus said they get their reward from the people around them. They may get the applause of others, the oohs and ahs of others for their eloquent prayers, but that's the only reward they will get.

Jesus said, "When you pray," he said, "I would encourage you—start to develop your prayer life in private. This is something personal between you and God." As a matter of fact, he said, "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." Develop a private prayer life first.

You don't have to have an actual prayer closet. It can be the secret place of our heart, praying to God anywhere, any time. But prayer begins as a personal, secret communication between us and God.

Jesus said prayer, at its essence, is not something to be a show to other people. It's something God wants—heart to heart with him in our lives. Start your prayer life, Jesus said, in secret.

He was coaching them up on how he prayed and how his life was empowered by the prayers that he prayed. It starts in secret, and then he encouraged them to pray from their authentic selves.

Start in private. Pray from your authentic self.

And then he said, “When you pray, pray like this.” And this is what we know of as the Lord's Prayer. But I would just mention to you that the Lord likely didn't need to pray this prayer. In this prayer is the confession of sins, and Jesus had no sins.

So more accurately, this might be a model prayer for the disciples, a structure of prayer that they could build their prayer life off of. “When you pray, pray like this.” Now there's nothing wrong like we pray it word for word in here, but I don't think that was Jesus' original intent. His intent was to get a communication going with God, with some basic things in mind about prayer.

And we're going to look at just the first part of it. We're going to unpack it over the next five weeks, but we can only really get through the first couple phrases here today, known as the Lord's Prayer, known as the Our Father, but a structure, a framework for how to come before the Lord with our authentic selves—maybe beginning in secret, in private, starting to talk to the Lord in prayer.

How did he begin it? “When you pray, pray like this: Our Father, our Father.” Now both of those words are important. The word *our* highlights the fact that God has no what you might call only children.

When a person comes into the family of God, they're joining a massive family down through history. God has many, many children in the world—sons and daughters of his. He loves family.

We're invited not to be a single child of the Most High God, but we're coming, and we're invited into a family that we have in the world, made up of all different kinds of backgrounds, all different kinds of denominations, all different kinds of ethnic races, socioeconomic statuses.

God is telling us when we come to him in prayer, we come with the whole family. God wants us to gather together, not be isolated as individuals. As a matter of fact, to know more of God's power and God's strength, we need to be a part of the community of faith in the world.

God has said we can love one another, build one another up, encourage one another. And I know as a father, when my children who are here today are relating well with each other, I take delight in that—when my kids get along.

God is no different when he sees his people in the world forgiving one another, overlooking offenses, not holding different small squabbles against each other, building each other up, having a sense that we're a part of this great community in the world. It honors him, and it allows his Spirit to work more freely among us.

We don't come to God as solo children. We are a part of this beautiful family in the world, with all different kinds of backgrounds and different expressions of our faith.

And so when we pray, we come before him with a sense of humility that we're one among many that he loves. But he loves us as a father.

Now a father is only a father because they have children. That's what makes you a father. Before I had children, I was a man. After I had children, I became a father.

Almighty God is a father, and his firstborn is Jesus. And he has invited us to be co heirs with Jesus in his family as our eternal Father.

This is something new, friends. The Old Testament people had a taste of this, a sense of this. But when Jesus started using the word *Father* more specifically in the New Testament, he was talking about something new that was happening—a spiritual rebirth where we can be born into the family of God.

When we come to God, Jesus is saying, “When you pray, understand a couple things. You're a part of a huge family with a great father who has adopted you into his family forever.”

The Bible says, “How great a love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of the Most High God.”

“Our Father,” Jesus is saying—this is the personal aspect of prayer. As a dad, I love it when my son or my daughter just wants to talk. They just want to talk.

Sometimes my daughter will text me and just say, “How's it going, Dad?” My son will text me, “What's up, beast?” What they're doing, in a sense, is just checking in with their dad.

I can only think that God, who loves his children more than I love my children, loves it when his people check in with him and say, “Hey, Father, just want to talk. Just you and I. Our—we together—our Father.” Those of us that are born again into the family of God.

Now, if you don't know God is your Father, can I encourage you that he wants you to know Him as Father? He sent his one and only Son. The Bible says he took his Son, his firstborn, and put him on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and mine so that we could be adopted into his family.

And then, by placing our faith in the work of Christ, you and I—anyone, anytime, anywhere—can become a child of the Most High God. And His Spirit will enter your spirit, and you'll start to naturally just say, “Abba, Father.” You will know. It'll be evidence that you've been born into the family of God.

So Jesus said, “When you pray, pray like this: our Father.” And then he said this: “Who art in Heaven.”

Now this is different. I know where my dad is today. He's in Harlan, Iowa. He's at church right now worshipping. He is found there. He lives in time and space and matter.

If I need my dad, I have to call him or text him. And if I need help with something, he's going to have to drive a long ways to get here. But not my heavenly Father.

When I come to him, we're talking about a being who Jesus said now he's in Heaven. He's not like an earthly father. He is not bound by the same restrictions that we are in creation. He exists outside of time. Matter is not an issue for him. Space is not an issue for him.

This God who is Father of his people is everywhere, all the time. Heaven rules over earth. He sits in Heaven, and he can do whatever he pleases, whenever he wants, anytime. Nothing is impossible with him.

Our Father—this is different, friends. We're not talking to earthly fathers now.

And the challenge with this—I just want to stop for a minute here—people who had an earthly father who didn't represent good fatherhood well have a challenge with this. They don't know how to relate to God as Father.

And what I encourage people like that to do is to just set aside your earthly father for a moment and study what true fatherhood is like in the Bible. In the Bible, fathers are encouraged to love their children, to raise them in the nurturing, caring, tenderness, and training of life in the Lord.

Biblical fathers are provisional. Fathers are to provide for their families. If they don't provide, the Bible says they should be reprimanded. They're worse than an unbeliever. They're to be protection of their families.

So we can assume from this God, as the perfect heavenly Father, loves his children with a tenderness and wants to nurture them and train them in his ways. He wants to provide for them in their journey in life, and he wants to protect them as a good father does.

This is where we begin in the picture of authentic fatherhood as God designed it. And he is like that—our Father who protects us, provides for us, cares for us, wants to lead us and guide us and nurture us and train us in life.

He supersedes any earthly father we've ever had, and this is the one we pray to: our Father who art in Heaven.

“Hallowed be your name.” There are a lot of dads in the world. They all have names. But when I hear the name of my father, something happens inside of me. H. David Butler—that's my dad. His name just rings a little different in here.

He is set apart by me. I feel differently when I hear his name as opposed to some other father's name. And Jesus is saying God wants us to feel the same about him when we come to him.

To be hallowed is to be regarded as sacred, revered, of great importance, of great significance. It signifies that there's something special.

So when you and I pray, God wants us to come before him and pray in a sense like this: “Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name.”

If you've never prayed, I would encourage you to start from your authentic self in secret, just starting to talk to God from your heart to his. He'll be happy you did.

And I bet as you learn how to do this, if you haven't already—and I know many of you have—but you'll be happy to deepen your prayer life. And we're going to ask God that he would continue to encourage us in this as we walk through this series.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for this opportunity to sit in this room and talk about what you've taught us in your word, even about this gift of prayer. You have encouraged us to pray. When you taught us about it, you said, “When you pray.”

And so, Father, I'm thinking today of maybe numerous people that are here who've really never opened their heart to you in prayer. I would ask that you, by your Spirit, would encourage them and help them to do this.

For we know that you have said in your word, even in the gift of prayer, when we don't know how to pray, you help us by your Spirit, teaching us how to walk in a relationship with you.

Guide us in this as your people, as your church here on the earth, Father, that we may know more of your power, your grace, in our lives.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.