

The Lord's Prayer: Prayer of Connection

Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 6:7-13

August 1, 2010

This past Wednesday I had the joy of going to my parents' house for dinner. As I drove up to Raleigh I listened to the radio. Sometimes I like to listen to talk radio, and that's what I was tuned into that afternoon. Well, the more I listened, the more anxious I got. Maybe you've been there, too. Maybe your anxiety doesn't come from the political landscape, perhaps it comes from your finances, your family relationships, your job situation, or even your spiritual life. No matter where it stems from, we all tend to get anxious about life.

I want you to listen again to what God says to you in Philippians 4:6-7:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Did you hear what will give you peace? Praying! God tells us to pray about everything. Tell him your needs, and thank him for what he has already done for you.

Jesus knew that his disciples needed the same peace that you and I need today, so he sat them down and taught them a prayer. He gave them a pattern of prayer that has come to be known as The Lord's Prayer, and we pray it every Sunday, just as Christians have done for 2000 years. Over the next few weeks we're going to take a detailed look at each individual phrase of the prayer and what it means to your life. I hope you'll not only learn to pray The Lord's Prayer more often, but you'll learn to live it in such a way that you will experience the peace of God in your life day to day.

We're going to start at the beginning (big surprise). *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.* In the opening of this prayer we are given two important realities. I want to begin with the second – that God's name is to be hallowed, or honored.

As we begin this prayer we begin to reflect on the character of God, and as we do, the pattern of our thinking and our praying is transformed. As we agree that God's very name should be honored, we are making a declaration about who God is. God told Moses that he was to be called, "I Am." God's name means that he exists...that he is sufficient...that he is self-existent and unchanging. As we focus on the immutability of God, we hopefully become less me-centered and more God-centered.

And now a paradox: As the second phrase causes our thoughts to dwell on the majesty, power and holiness of God, the first image of the prayer transforms the overwhelming nature of God into an entity that we can have a relationship with – a God that we can connect to.

The words, *Our Father*, were most unique for Jesus to use in reference to almighty God. From our vantage point on this side of the cross, we know and confess that Jesus was the Son of God, so it makes sense that he would refer to the Lord God as his Father. But why would he teach the disciples...and you and me...to call God, Father?

Jesus was trying to tell all of us that through himself, each of us would become a child of God. We would no longer be sin – alienated from the holiness of God. Rather, we would be brothers and sisters with Christ, and therefore, spiritually God’s children.

Galatians 4:4-7 reminds us:

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child.

There’s only one problem. For many people the term “father” is a negative term. It brings up all kinds of bad memories. For many people, you mention the term “father” and they think of disappointment...resentment... anger...maybe even abuse. Many fathers are distant, they’re distracted, or they’re uninvolved. So people think, “If God is like my father, then no thanks!”

What we all need to remember is that all earthly fathers are fallen and imperfect. However, God is perfect, so he will be a perfect father. So, what kind of Father is God?

1. He is a caring father.

- God is never too busy for you. 1 Peter 5:7 says, “*Cast all of your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.*” When you go to God, he never holds up a finger and tells you to wait just a minute, he’s on a call with someone else right then.
- God loves to meet your needs. The Bible says this in Matthew 7 “*If you know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him.*”
- 3. He is sympathetic to your hurts. The Bible says in Psalm 34 “*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*”

2. God is a consistent Father.

- God will never, never let you down. He can be counted on. He is dependable. He is reliable

- He's entirely worthy of your trust. James 1:17 *"Every good and perfect gift is from the Father who does not change like shifting shadows."* God is always unchanging.

3. He is a close Father

- The Bible makes it very clear that He's not distant. He's nearby when you need Him. He's available. He's accessible. Acts 17 says this talking about God's closeness, *"God did this [ie., He came close] so people would reach out for Him and find Him since He is not far from each of us."*

God loves you more deeply than you can possibly imagine, and calls you to be part of His family. So, how do you get connected to God as Father? That's why God sent His Son Jesus Christ to earth, to make the connection. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me you would know My Father as well."*

You can go to that Father for His approval, for His acceptance, and for His advice. Your heavenly Father has seen every moment of your life. He watched you being formed in your mother's womb. He watched you take your first breath. He watched every tear that's fallen, every success you've had, every joy, every regret, every jealousy, every envy. He knows the good, the bad and the ugly about you and He still loves you.

Find peace in the truth that you have a heavenly Father who not only loves you, but wants to be connected to you, now and for all eternity.