

“The Lord’s Prayer: Who’s Your Daddy?”

Luke 11:1-4, 9-13

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Scripture: Luke 11:1-4, 9-13

Sermon:

**Introduction...**

Who’s your daddy? For Luke Skywalker, the answer to this question was devastating! Can you imagine? Can you imagine finding out that your Dad is the terror of the galaxy? What would that do to your sense of identity?

Our fathers have a great influence on us. They shape our psychological, emotional and spiritual development in profound ways. If you don’t believe me, just imagine having Darth Vader as your father!

Sometimes we meet difficult or rude children. We are shocked by their behaviour. Then we meet their parents and think, “Oh, yeah. That’s why!” (Not always, but sometimes.) Our parents shape us in innumerable ways.

I recently read an article about a young French woman who, during the Great War, became friends with a young German soldier. Their relationship deepened over the course of the war and shortly before the Germans surrendered, she became pregnant. She gave birth to a son in 1918. In 1948, on her deathbed, she told her son, Jean-Marie Loret, that his father was Adolf Hitler! While some historians dispute this claim, Jean-Marie Loret published a book, *Your Father’s Name Was Hitler*. Regardless of whether or not the mother’s claims were true, this man spent most of his adult life under the belief that Adolf Hitler was his father! Having grown up as an illegitimate child in the 1920’s and 30’s, I don’t know if it was better or worse for Jean-Marie to be told his father was Adolf Hitler!

Clearly, having a famous tyrant as a father would affect you detrimentally. It can have a serious effect on your own emotional and even psychological development. For sure it has an effect on your spiritual development. One of my seminary profs told us that **by the age of 5 children already have a concept of God**. That’s not kinds who grow up in a church home. That’s all kids! And that understanding of God is based largely on their own parents. Our experience with our earthly fathers and mothers profoundly shapes our understanding of the all-powerful creator of the universe. Is he kind or mean? Is he present and approachable or distant or even absent? Is he patient or short tempered? Are rules arbitrary or fair?

If it is this clear that having a bad dad affects you deeply, then it should be equally clear that having a good dad, or a great dad would have a positive effect, right? And I’m not talking about having a great man as your father, a famous man. I mean having a man who is a great dad as your father. **Sometimes those whose fathers were “great men” feel a tremendous pressure to perform**, to live up to the standard set by their fathers. That’s not great either. But wouldn’t it be great if we all had dads who were great at being dads? Wouldn’t it be great if all our dads were perfect?

Who is your father? Do you know your dad? Do you have a good relationship with him? Do you have a bad relationship with him? Is your relationship with your dad strained, or even non-existent? Sadly, many people have a negative relationship with their father. Unfortunately, for many people their relationships with their fathers shapes their understanding of God. The fact that God is called our Father in the New Testament makes them not want to have a relationship with God at all! Or it at least shapes how they relate to God on a foundational level that they may not even be aware of.

Today we are beginning a short series on the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer is a model Jesus gave his followers on how to pray. It begins with the word “father.” Today we are going to take a closer look at what it means to pray to God as our Father.

**Text**

Let’s read together from Luke 11:1-4, 9-13. The Lord’s Prayer appears in both Matthew and Luke’s Gospels. There are some noticeable differences between their two accounts of this prayer. Luke’s is the shorter one and you may be surprised if you’re familiar with Matthew’s version.

**Overview**

One of the remarkable things about the Lord's Prayer is that it is so short! When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, the model he gave them was short, sweet and to the point. Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that longer prayers are better and that short prayers are spiritually immature. But that's not the case whatsoever! [Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 92]

Even in Jesus' day, the very religious Pharisees thought their long, wordy prayers were more pleasing to God. In Matthew's account of Jesus teaching this prayer, he gives the instructions in the context of not praying like the pagans do with many empty words. They think their prayers will be answered because of their many words.

**In the ancient world, when a person addressed an important official, especially in a letter, but also in spoken word, they would open with all that person's titles and positions.** "The emperor Caesar, Galerius, Valerius, Maximianus, Invictus, Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, Germanicus Maximus, Egyptian Maximus... Holder of the tribunicial authority for the 20<sup>th</sup> time, emperor for the 19<sup>th</sup>, consul for the 8<sup>th</sup>...." Etc. [Bailey, p. 92] When praying, the pagans around Israel would open up their prayers in a similar fashion addressing their gods. The Emperor, too, was treated as a god and was prayed to, so they would open up their prayers with all the emperor's titles and positions just like this. They dare not miss a title or honour in the opening of their prayer or else the god they were praying to might be offended and not answer their prayer! It is a remarkable contrast that Jesus taught his followers to begin their prayers, "Father." That's it!

By further way of contrast, within Jewish circles at that time, **devout Jews had 18 prayers they would say throughout the day.** Over the course of the day, Jewish prayers had a strong emphasis on Jerusalem and the temple, the Old Testament or "Law," a request for understanding of that Law and a vow of loyalty to it, there was an emphasis on the suffering of the Jewish community and a call for relief, forgiveness was requested but it was not linked to forgiving others, there was a request that God bless the agricultural year, that he would attack Israel's enemies and requests for mercy, peace and happiness. [Bailey, p. 106-107]

Contrast that with the Lord's Prayer:

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

There is no mention of the temple, Jerusalem, Israel or the Law. There is no mention of attacks on one's enemies. Forgiveness is closely tied to our forgiveness of others. The request, in Matthew, is that God's kingdom would come on all the earth, not just one country! Luke's version just asks that God's kingdom come! **The Lord's prayer is remarkably global and remarkably brief.**

This is the model Jesus gave his followers for prayer. He didn't say, "Pray these words," but "Pray this way," or "Pray in this manner or style." We are not instructed to recite the words as much as to follow the pattern. Over the coming weeks we are going to study the pattern so we know how to pray ourselves.

### ***The First Petition***

The Lord's prayer can be broken down into 5 or 6 petitions depending on whether you are reading Matthew or Luke's version. **A petition is a request.** The prayer is composed of a few requests which form a model for how we are to approach God with our requests. The first petition, or request, is "Father, hallowed be your name." This is what we are going to zoom in on today.

The New Testament was written in Greek, as you probably already know. However, Jesus and his disciples would have spoken together in Aramaic, the local language at the time. This means that all of the Greek in the Gospels describing what Jesus said is a translation from the Aramaic Jesus said it in to the Greek the Gospel writers recorded it in. However, there are a few instances in which the Gospel writers kept Jesus' original Aramaic words in their text. Why? Because they knew that to translate the word into Greek would lose some of its impact. They wanted to be sure to record the actual Aramaic word or words Jesus used in order to carry home the impact of what Jesus originally said because it was so profound.

The first word of the Lord's prayer is one such example. **The first word in the Lord's prayer is "Abba."** This is not Greek, but Aramaic. There are two things we need to understand about the significance of this word. First, formal Jewish prayers were all spoken or recited in Hebrew, not Aramaic. But Jesus clearly taught his disciples to pray in Aramaic! **Jesus taught his disciples to pray in their common language, not the formal language of Jewish prayer, Hebrew.** Jesus brought prayer down to the common person's level. Today, we

need to apply this as well. We don't need to use big, fancy words when we pray. We don't need to pray in formal language or a formal tone. Prayer in everyday language is not only completely acceptable, it is actually preferable! It is how Jesus taught us to pray.

Second, what does "abba" mean? It is the Aramaic word for "dad" or "daddy." **It was one of the first words that Aramaic speakers would teach their babies!** Even today, there are a number of people groups in the Middle East in which "abba" as the first word a baby learns! [Bailey, p. 97]

What is one of the first words we teach our children? "Dada." Soon that becomes "daddy" or "dad." This is the way Jesus teaches his followers to approach God! Any Jew could use the formal, religious word "Abinu" for father, but Jesus uses "Abba with which a child addressed his human father." [GB Caird, *Luke*, p. 151] "This great Aramaic word [abba] affirms both respect in addressing a superior and a profound personal relationship between the one who uses it and the one addressed." [Bailey, p. 98] In the Old Testament, and in the Jewish daily prayers, God is referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of their forefathers. But Jesus brings God that much closer. He is not the God of their fathers, he is Father!

I think those of us who have grown up with the Lord's prayer may take this for granted. By way of contrast, consider the Muslim view of God. Muslims would never refer to Allah as Father! Why? Because it uses a human model for God. In the Muslim view, this leads to idolatry! Allah is too holy, too distant to be called Dad. And to use a human analogy for ones relationship to Allah is idolatrous. [Bailey, p. 98]

Jesus teaches us to come to God in prayer and to come to him as our Dad. That is remarkable! But for some of us, our image of dad is deeply flawed. As we spoke about off the top, some of our fathers leave a lot to be desired. Some of our fathers were not kind, or were difficult, or were distant or even absent! Maybe you struggle to think of God as Dad? Or maybe you do think of God as Dad and that puts distance between you and God! If that's the case, then I am deeply sorry. That is incredibly painful.

But let me also warn you that it is also idolatrous! What do I mean?!? When we approach God as Father and let our own experience of our earthly fathers determine what that means, we are committing a form of idolatry. [Bailey, p. 99] Even if we have a good relationship with our earthly father, we must not allow that relationship to define what it means for God to be Dad. Why? Because all of our earthly fathers, good and not so good, are sinful human beings. When we allow our experience of "father" determine what it means for God to be our Heavenly Father, we are projecting a view of a sinful person onto God. This is to make God into our own image, or at least the image of our earthly dad. That is sinful!

When it comes to God being our Father, we must let God determine what that means. We must then evaluate our own earthly fathers in light of what God says fatherhood is all about. We must evaluate our own dads in light of God as the ultimate, perfect, best, most awesome father ever! And for many of us this is really hard because of the baggage we carry around about our earthly dads. Our pain and brokenness over our earthly fathers overrides our understanding of God as Father. We are too enmeshed in our pain over having sinful earthly fathers to let God speak his truth to us about being our Heavenly Dad. That is why so many people, frequently antagonistic towards Christianity but not always, refuse to call God Father, or dismiss God because he is Father, or criticize God in terms of the failures of their own Fathers. This is idolatry! We must let God set the standard for all Dads. And the standard he sets, if we are willing to see it, is amazing!

One last word about Abba. It is in the plural possessive form. That is, "Abba" is "our Father." When we pray the Lord's Prayer it is not just "My Father" but "Our Father. This is a reminder that even when we pray alone we pray as part of a community. "Our Father" forces us to look down the pew and "across the world and see brothers and sisters in every land." [Bailey, p. 101] **The Lord's Prayer opens with a word that breaks us out of our individualism.** It reminds us that we do not pray alone, we do not pray in isolation, but as part of a much larger family and global community.

So that's what it means to call God "Father." That's a lot loaded into one little word! But that's just the first word, not the whole petition or request. What is it that we are asking our Father to do in this opening line of the Lord's Prayer? "Father, hallowed be your name." That's a tricky one. We don't really use the word hallowed much. And what's in a name? Does it just mean that we not use the word "God" when we swear? Of course not!

We've spoken about names a number of times in the past, so I won't belabour the point today. But let me

summarize by saying a name **“summed up a person’s whole character, all that was known or revealed about him.”** [Leon Morris, *Luke*, p. 211] So when we speak of God’s name we are speaking of “all that God is and has revealed of himself and asks for a proper attitude in the face of this.” [Morris, p. 211] **God’s name also includes his purpose** because his purpose is part of who he has revealed himself to be.

Let me give you some examples of how God’s name is described or used in Scripture. In Exodus 34:5-7, when God establishes his covenant with Israel on Mt Sinai, God identifies himself and his character: “Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” This is God declaring his name and character, identifying himself as one party entering into the Covenant.

Or, consider Psalms 20:7 and 54:1. “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” “Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might.” The Psalmists, and by extension all of those who recite or invoke these Psalms, are trusting in God’s character, nature and purpose to save them. 1 John 2:12, a NT passage, says, “I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.” It is on account of God’s name, God’s character, nature and purpose, that our sins are forgiven!

The first petition brings up the fact that we are to approach God as our Father, as our Dad. It asks that his name be kept holy. So it brings up his character, nature and purpose. God’s character is good. His nature is loving. His purpose is to save us! Jesus goes on to explain this in Luke 11. He tells a parable about prayer right after he gives this model prayer. Then, in verses 9-13 as we read before, he says that those who ask, seek and knock will have they ask for given, what they seek found and the door will be opened to them.

Then Jesus gives compares earthly fathers to God. He asks rhetorically if any earthly father, when his son asks for a fish will give him a poisonous snake instead, or if his son asks for an egg to eat, will give him a scorpion? Of course not! Earthly fathers understand the need to provide for their children. In fact, earthly fathers usually love providing for their children.

[3 pics] I know I love giving good things to Megan. On the left is a picture of Megan from a couple years ago. We were at Costco and we gave her ice cream for the first time. Didn’t take her long to ask for more! The second picture is from a few months ago. Megan discovered that we have ice cream in our freezer. Darn it! She’s getting taller and our freezer is on the bottom. (You’ll notice a theme here!) But I didn’t mind giving her ice cream when she asked for it, did I? No! Because I love her and want to give her good things. The last picture is from a week ago. I was working at Starbucks and Amy brought Meg by to visit. I had just bought a bagel for my lunch. Meg asked if she could have a bite. How could I say no that face? And I was happy to give her part of my bagel even if it was my lunch! Why? Because I absolutely adore my daughter! As her father, I want to provide for her in her need and in her want.

Jesus uses the parallel of human fathers providing and giving to their children. He then calls human fathers, who provide well “evil” in comparison to the great goodness and love of God! And Jesus is right! I’m a sinful, broken human being. I’m not perfect at all. I fail daily. And yet even I, broken sinner that I am, know how to give good things to my child. How much more does God know about giving good things to his children?!? And this is the God that Jesus instructs us to come to in prayer saying, “Dad!”

So we come to our Dad and we ask that his name, meaning his character, nature and purpose, be hallowed, or kept holy. What does that mean? What does “hallowed” mean? **Hallowed means to be kept holy or set apart for a special purpose.** But isn’t God already holy? What do we mean by “Let your name be made holy?”

Yes, God is holy. His character is holy. This petition is not asking that God’s name be made holy as if it wasn’t holy enough. Rather, it means that we on earth honour and respect his name as holy; that we recognize his character and purpose as being holy and live accordingly.

Working on this message, I found something very helpful in Ezekiel. [Caird, p. 152] In Eze 36:22-31 God talks about what he is going to do in Israel. Leading up to v. 22 God talks about how Israel has profaned his name. That is the opposite of making holy! They have given God a bad name among the nations. They have

defied his purposes and broken covenant with him. As a result, God is going to allow their enemies to conquer them and carry them into exile.

Then, in 22-23, God picks up, “Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name which you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.” He then goes on to describe how he will rescue them from exile, gather them up and bring them back into their own land. He will cleanse them and give them a new heart and put a new spirit in them. That is, he will demonstrate his character by saving them and through their salvation the nations will know what God’s character is like and they will honour him for it. They will hallow his name!

**God’s name is most powerfully respected as holy when his character is demonstrated in the salvation and transformation of his people.** This is what we are praying for when we open our prayers “Father, hallowed be your name.” We are coming to our awesome Dad and asking that the people of the world honour him and respect his character because of the saving and transforming work he has done in us and his people. That means that we are asking him to do more in us in terms of salvation and transformation and we are committing to live out the saving work he has done in us. We are asking for his Spirit to work in us so that our character reflects his character because, as the people who bear his name “Christians,” we are his ambassadors to the world. If we give God a bad name in the world that is the opposite of making his name holy. So we ask our Dad to work in us so that we can live up to his name and make his name holy in the world because of the work he is doing in us!

### ***Application***

Wow! Such a profound first line of prayer! What a model Jesus has given us! So how do we bring this down to the everyday? How do we model our own prayers after this prayer? If this is the model for our prayers, how do we apply the model?

**First, notice that we have to learn how to pray.** Jesus’ disciples asked to be taught how to pray. John’s disciples asked John how to pray. It’s completely reasonable for us to ask God to teach us how to pray. It is completely reasonable to ask our pastors, elders and Christian leaders to teach us how to pray. Prayer is something we must learn.

Second, **pray as you speak normally.** We don’t have to use formal language, fancy words or special vocabulary to pray.

Third, **pray like you would talk to your dad if you had the best possible relationship with him!** If your relationship with your dad isn’t great, or if your dad isn’t great, or if you have baggage about your dad, imagine what you wish your dad was like. Then imagine in 10 times better. Start there as you approach God. If that’s hard, ask God to show you what it means that he is your Dad and the best Dad possible.

Another way to help yourself understand God as Father properly is to think about the fact that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God. He and God share the same character, nature and purposes. Jesus said in John 14:9, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” So if you struggle with praying to God as Father, think of Jesus. All the great stuff about Jesus applies to the Father too! [Darrell W. Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words that Change the World*, p. 23]

Pray that God will send his Holy Spirit to work in you to teach you what God is like. Ask for the Spirit to teach your heart to cry out, “Abba Father” as Paul says in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. It is through the work of Christ on the cross, applied to us through the work of the Spirit in us, that we are God’s adopted children who are able to come to God as Abba Father. This is all part of the whole salvation package!

Fourth, when you begin praying, **keep God, his character and purposes at the top of your list of priorities.** Don’t open your prayer with what you want. Don’t open your prayer with what you need. Don’t begin with a laundry list of requests. Rather, begin your prayer by orienting yourself towards God. That is an act of repentance, actually, adjusting your thoughts, will and desires toward God. Think about him first, his character and his purposes first. Let that be where you begin your prayer.

Then, thinking of God’s awesome character, pondering the fact that you are his adopted child whom he

loves to death, come to him with the boldness of a little child asking his or her father for ice cream! Know that God will hear your prayer. He may say no for now, but he hears it. He will answer it. It will not go unheard or ignored.

I put together a little revised version of this first petition. Listen to it as I incorporate the lessons we've learned. "Dear Dad, best Dad ever, model of awesomeness for all Dads of all time, we your children are coming to you now to ask that your good character, nature and purpose be known and honoured in our lives and reflected in all the world. We want other people to see your goodness shining through us. Please show your saving work in our character and in the way we live every day as your people. We want to be chips off the ol' block, just like Jesus is, so people will love you like you love us and them."

This is how we are to pray, because we have the best dad ever! Amen.