

The Four Most Important Prayers – Prayer #1

1. Warm-up question: When you were a child, what's something childish you asked God to do for you?
2. For most of us, prayer is a mystery, even as adults. What is prayer? How does it work? What should I say when I pray? Why are some prayers answered and not others? That's probably why Jesus' disciples said, "Lord teach us how to pray." Luke 11:1. In response, Jesus gave us "The Lord's Prayer" as a model that illustrates the four most important things we should pray. On Sunday, we tackled the first of those things, the NUMBER 1 THING Jesus said we should pray for. Let's get started by reading Matthew 6:7-15, as printed on p. 3.
3. Before diving into the NUMBER 1 THING we should pray, we need to focus on two preliminary points that lay the groundwork for what we should pray. First, notice the name Jesus encourages us to use to address God in prayer. Our Father who art in heaven. . . ." The underlying Greek word is *pater*, which means Father. But remember, Jesus didn't speak Greek. His primary language was Aramaic. Elsewhere the New Testament tells us that the Aramaic word Jesus used for Father was *Abba*, which was a Jewish term of endearment that a little child, just learning to talk, would use to address a beloved Daddy. The closest English equivalents are Dada or Papa.
 - a. That's a very intimate way of addressing God – Papa God. How does that sit with you? What do you like about it? What about it makes you uncomfortable?
 - b. Most of us habitually refer to God in prayer in a certain way. Examples are "God," "Lord," or "Father. What's your most common way of addressing God?
 - c. How does praying to "God" or "Lord" or Father feel different than praying to God as "Papa"? Do you think the term we use makes a difference? If so, how?
 - d. Jeff shared stories about Dads who did something special that showed their deep love for his kids. Have a couple people share additional stories about a father or grandfather who did something special that showed their deep love for his kids.
 - e. In your heart of hearts, do you believe God loves you with the same intensity as the fathers and grandfathers in the stories just told?
 - f. Have you ever tried using "Papa God" or "Abba" as a way of addressing God in prayer? Are you willing to experiment with it?
4. Getting in touch with God as Papa doesn't mean that we bring God down to our level. It's possible to experience great intimacy with God while also holding God in great awe. This is the other preliminary point we see in the Lord's Prayer. "Our *Abba* who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . . ." Note the word "hallowed," which means greatly revered, venerable, deserving of respect because of importance and power.

- Yes, God is our Papa, but our Papa is AWESOME. Even as we grow the intimacy of our relationship with God, it's important that we never make the mistake of thinking that we can ever come close to fully understanding or controlling God. Anybody who thinks that is fooling themselves – you know the kind of person, their church has taught them 'everything' about God, and they've got the 'right' answer to everything.
- a. Sean Penn says, "When everything gets answered, it's fake – the mystery is the truth." What do you think he means? Do you agree?
 - b. Max Deprea says, "We do not grow by knowing all of the answers, but rather by living with the questions." What do you think he means? Do you agree?
 - c. God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8. What do you think that means?
 - d. When in your life have you experienced something that made you keenly aware of the incredible awesomeness of God?
5. If God loves me like the best Papa ever and wants all the best for me, but God's ways are infinitely beyond my ability to grasp, what's the NUMBER 1 THING I should ask God for? Jesus tells us, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Our natural tendency is to tell God what we want. But if God loves me like the best Papa ever and if God's knowledge and wisdom are infinitely beyond me, what I should really want is what God wants for me.
- a. How do you feel about making "Thy will be done" your foremost prayer? What do you like about it? What about it makes you uncomfortable?
 - b. Jeff said, "Remember when you were a kid and your parents always got to decide what would happen and you just went along for the ride because you trusted them and knew they'd do what's best even if you didn't understand – and because of that you were free, free to just be, sweet surrender! It can be like that with us and God. Stop trying to control everything, stop trying to understand everything, and just make the most of whatever happens, and your life will be so much better." Tell us about a time when life took you where you didn't want to go, but you were able to surrender and embrace it and partner with God to make the most of it. What happened? How did it feel to surrender?
 - c. Read the Oswald Chambers' quote on p. 3. What are your thoughts about what he says? Do you think this is what Jesus meant when he said, "You must become like a little child" to live a full spiritual life?

- d. The Bible encourages us to tell God what we hope for and want. That's what Jesus did in the garden. "If possible," he said, "let this cup pass from me." But Jesus didn't stop there. He added, "Yet not my will, but yours be done." There it is again – that key prayer. Tell us about something challenging you're facing right now? In that area of challenge, are you willing to begin praying, "Thy will be done. Help me to partner with you to make the most of what's happening?"

Matthew 6:7-15

⁷And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

⁹In this manner, therefore, pray: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. ¹⁰Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Oswald Chambers, "My Utmost for His Highest"

"Our natural inclination is to be so precise – trying always to forecast accurately what will happen next – that we look upon uncertainty as a bad thing. We think that we must reach some predetermined goal, but that is not the nature of spiritual life. The nature of spiritual life is that we are certain in our uncertainty. To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. This is generally expressed with a sigh of sadness, but it should be an expression of breathless expectation. As soon as we abandon ourselves to God and do the task God has placed closest to us, God begins to fill our lives with surprises. [Remember,] Jesus said, "Unless you become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of God." Matthew 18:3. The spiritual life is the life of a child. We are not uncertain of God, just uncertain of what God's going to do next. When we have the right relationship with God, life is full of spontaneous, joyful uncertainty and expectancy."